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Afternoon Sitting

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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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TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2009

The House met at 1:35 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Introductions by Members

Hon. G. Abbott: In the gallery today I have three constituents, including my wife Lesley. With Lesley is a special guest not only in the Legislature here today but later today at Government House. Pam Beech is one of the recipients today of the Community Achievement Award. Pam has been a remarkable member of the community of Sicamous for four decades. She's a life-long resident of the Shuswap. She has played terrific leading roles in minor hockey, community services and many other areas. She's joined today by her grandson Kristian Beech.

I'd like the House to not only make Pam welcome but also extend to her our congratulations on her remarkable service to the community as reflected in a community achievement award.

J. McGinn: I'd like to welcome some grade 11 social science students from Eric Hamber Secondary School. Some of you know that Eric Hamber is one of the largest schools, certainly in Vancouver if not British Columbia. Welcome them to the Legislature today along with their teacher Mr. David Smith, who is head of the social sciences department, Ms. Sadeeq Mohammed and other teachers who organized this event today. If you'd please make them welcome.

Hon. B. Bennett: In 1920 a man by the name of Tom Uphill was elected to this provincial Legislature. He served for 40 years as the MLA for the riding of what was then known as Fernie. His great-grandson Brett is in the gallery someplace today. He's a firefighter from Fernie. Please help make Brett welcome here today.

S. Herbert: On May 15, 1981, a great man joined our province, a boy at the time. Members here on this side of the House will know that May 15, 1981, is my birthday, but I speak not of myself. I speak of my twin brother Doug Herbert who joins us in the House today. Please make him welcome.

Hon. L. Reid: We're joined today in the gallery by Rheta Steer. Some of you will recall her. She was a lovely woman, a dear friend, who assisted me with the care of my infants when they both spent their very early years with us. She is joined by her dear friend from Montreal, Joan. I would ask the House to please make them welcome.

K. Conroy: I would like to introduce Lee Depellegrin. He's the vice-president of the Trail firefighters. Yesterday was the first time he had ever sat in the chamber, and he

so enjoyed himself that he decided to come back today and try it again.

Would you please join me in welcoming him.

J. Yap: I would like the House to join me in welcoming a group of 50 enthusiastic grades 6 and 7 students from the great school of Tomekichi Homma Elementary School in my riding of Richmond-Steveston.

They're here with a group of chaperones, of course, and their teacher, Mr. Don Allison, who is a frequent visitor here with students because he believes in showing his students how parliamentary democracy works by bringing them here to Victoria.

Would the House please make them feel warmly welcome.

Hon. J. McIntyre: I have a very special treat today. We're joined in the House today by several individuals representing the Squamish Nation and their education committee, who had a lovely meeting with the Minister of Education to discuss their aboriginal enhancement agreement.

As I read the names, you'll note that several of them are from the Harry family, who I have had the pleasure of getting to know over the years. This is their first visit to Victoria, but they also travelled to Ottawa to receive the federal government's apology. I know this has been a very special time for them.

[1340]

Let me read the names: Dale Harry, Squamish Nation councillor; Gwen Harry, elder; Terry Ann Harry, the elders coordinator; Paul Wick, administrator; Joy Joseph-McCullough, the associate director of education; Jackie Williams, enhancement agreement committee member; Linda Williams, enhancement agreement committee member; and Henry Williams. I would like the House to make them feel very, very welcome.

R. Fleming: I have a school group here, as well, from my constituency today. I would like to introduce from S.J. Willis high school, Carol Aileen, a teacher who is here with three students: Carter Glennon, Lucan Day and Miles Smith. Will the House please make these visitors welcome.

S. Hawkins: Visiting the Legislature today and in the gallery are two very dear friends of mine, Brad and Laurie Field. Brad is a great community builder, and he's worked with Cops for Kids and Kelowna Women's Shelter, and he's going to be honoured this afternoon at Government House with a B.C. achievement award. I'm asking the members to please make them feel very welcome.

H. Bloy: It's a pleasure for me to introduce three hard-working Burnaby firefighters who are back with us in the gallery today. It's amazing the commitment that

they make all on their own time to our communities. We have Miles Ritchie, who is one of the cofounders of the World Police and Fire Games, coming this summer, July 31, mainly in Burnaby. We have Rob Lamoureux and Mike Hurley, who is president of the B.C. Professional Fire Fighters Association, and he's from Burnaby. Would the House please make them welcome.

Tributes

KALAMALKA SECONDARY SCHOOL BASKETBALL CHAMPIONS

Hon. T. Christensen: This afternoon I'd like the House to join me in acknowledging the accomplishments of a number of young women athletes at Kalamalka Secondary School in Vernon. I was actually a graduate of what was Kalamalka Junior Secondary School at the time. I won't say what year. But on Saturday the Kalamalka Lakers senior girls basketball team captured the provincial championship.

I think what is remarkable is that for many of the athletes on the senior girls team, this is in fact their fourth provincial championship. Many of them also won the junior basketball championship, the junior volleyball championship and the senior girls volleyball championship. So obviously a dynasty in the works at Kalamalka Secondary, and I would ask the House to join me in congratulating all of these young athletes, their coaches and their many supporters who have made this possible.

Introductions by Members

C. Wyse: I would ask the House to join with me today in recognizing two members from Cariboo South who are also here with us in Victoria visiting Government House to receive their Community Achievement Award in recognition of the great service that they have provided their communities over the years. I would like this House to recognize Alex Bracewell, Havanna Hamley and Lori Fry of 100 Mile.

J. Yap: Just to add to my welcome, the school group from Tomekichi Homma Elementary School includes two teachers who are here with us in the gallery: Michael Gilles and Bonnie Makutra. Would the House please make them welcome as well.

Statements (Standing Order 25b)

UNsung HERO AWARD RECIPIENT GORDON HARPER

C. James: I'm pleased to rise today to talk about the Unsung Hero Award in my community. The Unsung

Hero Award is an initiative of the First Unitarian Church of Victoria and the Community Council. An unsung hero is a skilled, dedicated person who has served the larger community long and well but never received headlines. Their contributions deserve to be better known and publicly applauded because they will inspire the rest of us.

This annual award acknowledges and celebrates the work of one among a number of deserving citizens within B.C.'s capital region, someone who has dedicated themselves to the goals of social justice, peace and liberty for all and someone who is also committed to sharing their knowledge and resources for the betterment of their fellow citizens. I'm pleased to rise today to recognize Gordon Harper, recipient of the Unsung Hero Award 2009.

Gordon is the executive director of the Umbrella Society for Addictions and Mental Health. His career spans over 20 years of community service. Gordon moved through the hard road of recovery, he says, because one day after spending days drinking alone in his apartment, a family member knocked on his door. His cousin Marilyn said to him: "This has to stop, and what are we going to do about it?"

[1345]

Having someone say "we" moved Gordon down that tough road to recovery. He believes that everyone deserves to have a "we," and he's passionate about helping people in their journey to recovery.

The Umbrella Society has a hard-working board of directors and a staff of only four, but you'll find Gordon and his staff everywhere in our community, meeting people in coffee shops, hospitals, detox homes, recovery homes and shelters. Everywhere they are that needs help, Gordon and his staff are there. No matter the need, they're there to provide support.

For that and more, I would like to ask this House to join me to thank Gordon Harper and congratulate him on being the recipient of the Unsung Hero Award 2009.

TRI-UNIVERSITY MESON FACILITY

R. Lee: In these troubled economic times, British Columbia is taking the high road to ensure a bright and prosperous future. I want to remind members of this House of a project all British Columbians can be proud of: TRIUMF, Canada's national laboratory for particle and nuclear physics located in Vancouver and founded by UBC, UVic and my local university of SFU in Burnaby.

I know that a number of the scientists from SFU are working hard at TRIUMF, including John D'Auria, professor of nuclear astrochemistry; Michel Vetterli, professor of physics; Tom Ruth, professor of chemistry; Richard Helmer; and Peter Jackson.

TRIUMF is bringing international business to B.C. A \$2 million agreement was signed with India last year to

manufacture high-tech components in Richmond by PAVAC Industries. And a new \$1 million partnership was launched with MDS Nordion to develop advanced medical isotope products.

TRIUMF has an ambitious plan for the next five years, to focus on breakthroughs in medical imaging, information technology and the very nature of matter. An independent assessment of the plan identified more than \$1 billion of economic activities and 1,200 jobs that will be generated.

In May, 2,000 of the world's most talented accelerator physicists will come to a conference in downtown Vancouver because of TRIUMF. I believe that places like TRIUMF give B.C. a competitive advantage in this difficult economic climate. For instance, TRIUMF is proposing a new accelerator that could play a role in addressing the medical isotope production problems that we hear about in Chalk River, Ontario.

Mr. Speaker, we know the critical role that science, technology and innovation play in driving long-term economic success. The more I learn about the innovative initiative spearheaded by SFU researchers and TRIUMF, the more impressed I am at the ingenuity and dedication of our scientists here in British Columbia.

SURREY MEMORIAL HOSPITAL SOCIETY

S. Hammell: In 1955 a delegation of determined women from Surrey chartered a plane and flew to Victoria to lobby their government. These women wanted an audience with W.A.C. Bennett, the Premier of the day, to impress upon him the need for appropriate health care in Surrey and the need to build a hospital in this growing municipality. It may sound familiar.

Dramatic action is usually preceded by frustration, and so it is true in this story. In 1946 the Royal Columbian Hospital served notice that they would no longer accept patients from Surrey, making it abundantly clear to all that Surrey needed its own hospital. The Surrey Memorial Hospital Society formed in 1947 to address this need, but there was immediately a conflict on where the hospital would be located.

A hospital did proceed in White Rock, and although various auxiliary groups were raising money in north Surrey, where the majority of the population was located, there was no commitment by the province to help out — thus, the need to fly to Victoria to lobby W.A.C. Bennett.

The government agreed to build the hospital if the community first came up with one-third of the costs. The amazing ladies' auxiliary led the community in raising the money. The construction of the hospital started in 1957, and it opened in 1959 — 50 years ago.

Today I'd like to honour this amazing organization. The Surrey Memorial Hospital Auxiliary was born as the ladies' auxiliary, and then, as over the years men joined, it changed its name to Surrey Memorial Hospital Auxiliary.

Over the past 60 years, the auxiliary has raised over \$4 million and contributed thousands of hours serving the hospital and raising money.

[1350]

I'd like to congratulate the Surrey Memorial Hospital Auxiliary for 60 years of service to the community of Surrey.

ARMY, NAVY AND AIR FORCE CLUB IN STEVESTON

J. Yap: The Army, Navy and Air Force Unit 284 Steveston, or ANAF 284, began its journey in 1946, when 30 local veterans obtained a charter to open up a veterans club in Steveston. From their humble beginnings to their present day successes, ANAF 284 has been an integral part of the community. Starting with a temporary club room, to purchasing a building and converting it to a fully licensed club, ANAF 284 offered a place to meet, read, play billiards and poker, and meet up with good friends as well as a place to stage their fundraising efforts.

Unfortunately, in December 1956 the clubhouse was destroyed by fire. For the next three years ANAF 284 was forced to make do with the help of the membership and the ladies' auxiliary, with meetings in members' homes, while they raised funds for permanent quarters. Luckily, after a few difficult years, ANAF 284 was able to get back on its feet and continued to support the Steveston community.

In the 1960s and 70s the attention of ANAF 284 was turned to the building of seniors homes in the area. Raffles and lotteries arranged by the members were able to help fund several seniors residences, including one in Steveston, for a total of 198 suites.

Not a group to only support part of the community, ANAF 284 has helped to sponsor and fundraise for many local groups over the years, including children's sports teams, the B.C. Cancer Society, the Red Cross, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, cadets, Terry Fox fund, Richmond General Hospital, Steveston Community Centre and many, many more groups in Steveston and beyond.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the House, please join me in thanking all the members of the Army, Navy, and Air Force unit 284 for their past and present service of the community, making Steveston the special place it is to call home.

CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY NETWORK IN MAPLE RIDGE AND PITT MEADOWS

M. Sather: The child, youth and family network is a unique affiliation of over 140 organizations working together to enhance the well-being of families, youth and children, including the Katzie First Nation in Maple

Ridge-Pitt Meadows. Through monthly round-table meetings and regular e-mails to its members, CYFN strengthens the availability and quality of services and resources in our communities.

The variety of organizations present at a CYFN meeting is impressive and demonstrates the value of bringing together a multitude of perspectives on the social issues facing our communities. CYFN committees range from early childhood education to middle childhood matters, to literacy, to substance misuse prevention and integrated case management.

Members include the Family Education and Support Centre, Cythera Transition House, PLEA, Ridge Meadows Association for Community Living, Big Brothers Big Sisters and many more. Affiliates include the Teen Resource Network, Building Community Solutions, and the Alouette Home Start Society.

CYFN has access to a community van which is available for use in both emergency situations and to facilitate fun events for kids, such as driving groups to the local skate park. There's also a community laptop, projector and screen available for community development activities. CYFN is known for their inclusive and holistic perspective, promoting a culture of connectiveness, striving for positive changes for its member organizations and ultimately for the citizens who benefit from its support.

It would be difficult to find a community organization that is not connected to the CYFN. Thank you to the child, youth and family network for continually working to enhance the quality of life of our children, youth and families in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

SERPENTINE ENHANCEMENT SOCIETY

D. Hayer: The beauty and value of British Columbia's environment is synonymous with the salmon that are raised in our streams and rivers, that provide substance to the first nations, that feed the wildlife and grace our dinner tables. Yet our salmon, the fish that have sustained a historic industry in this province, are in grave danger. It is through the work of incredible groups like the Serpentine Enhancement Society that operate the Tynehead Hatchery in my riding, that hopefully will return the salmon to its countless numbers.

[1355]

The Serpentine Enhancement Society raises over a quarter-million salmon fry for release into Surrey's Serpentine River and operates an ambitious educational program for children in some 40 school classrooms in Surrey. The society, led by my constituency president, Glenn Wright, teaches the salmon life cycle to school children at the hatchery and provides salmon eggs for raising salmon right in the children's classroom. The society also provides thousands of egg-to-fry displays to the B.C. Teachers Federation for their use in classrooms.

The society has a membership of over 59 and dozens of key volunteers from my constituency, such as Dr. Tom Goodman and Barry Child; including other constituents of mine such as President Glenn Wright and directors Alan Dobby, Dave Woods, Carol Wright and Frank Marshalok. Other directors are Ebb and Julia Budgell, Bruce Easton, Chris Hamming and Lorne Mayer.

I ask the House to join me in congratulating all these fine environmentalists who are working to ensure the future of salmon and educating our children on the value of salmon. I also ask the House to support their desire to see the Pacific salmon, including the steelhead, recognized as British Columbia's official fish.

Oral Questions

JOB SECURITY OF GM PLACE WORKERS FOR OLYMPIC GAMES

C. James: Some 750 workers at GM Place don't know if they'll have a job during the Olympic Games. That's what they've been told by their employer. So my question is to the minister. Will he explain why the jobs of 750 hard-working British Columbians are in limbo?

Hon. C. Hansen: I heard earlier about some of the comments that the Leader of the Opposition has been making, and quite frankly, I believe that those comments are absolutely reckless and irresponsible. For her to be fearmongering among the workers at various facilities around this province....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Take your seat, Minister.
Continue.

Hon. C. Hansen: Yesterday, as was raised by the opposition with regard to 200 employees at Hastings Park.... We knew — and actually their employer knew at the time that leases were signed with the city of Vancouver many, many months ago — that that facility was going to not be able to operate the slot machines during that one-month period of time.

I can tell you that just in the last 24 hours, the B.C. Restaurant and Foodservices Association has stepped up to the plate and said that they'll actually provide a job-matching service for those employees, because they know that there are going to be jobs for anybody in British Columbia that has experience in food and beverage service in this province. It's a great opportunity for them. It's a great opportunity for this province.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Opposition has a supplemental.

C. James: I'd tell the minister to talk to those employees, as I did this morning, to see how excited they are about losing their jobs for a month. I talked to an employee who's worked at Hastings for 43 years. He's put his heart and soul into that facility and into this province by paying tax dollars into the provincial budget, and now this government says to him and his family: "Sorry, you're out of luck for a month." That's the response this government has given those employees.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

C. James: This is 750 more employees. These are mainly women. They don't make a lot of money, but they contribute a lot to B.C., and like all British Columbians, they're excited about the games. They want to be a part of it, and they've been told that that can't happen. They're not going to be working.

Their employer says it has no idea whether they'll have a job or not. Again, my question is to the minister. Why are these workers being treated so badly by this government, and what is he going to do to ensure that they get to stay on the job during the Olympics?

Hon. C. Hansen: I understand how unsettling it would be for an individual who is told that he may not have employment for that particular month.

[1400]

But what the Leader of the Opposition is doing with the fearmongering that she is engaged in is exacerbating that problem.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Just sit down for a second.

Now, Members, let's listen to the question and listen to the answer.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Member.

Continue, Minister.

Hon. C. Hansen: In the case of Hastings Park we recognize, with the installation of the slot machines and the casino operations there.... That was only installed a year and a half ago. At the time of that installation and the creation of those new jobs, it was clearly understood in the lease arrangements with the city of Vancouver that that facility would not be operational.

If the Leader of the Opposition has an example of someone who has worked at Hastings Park for 42 years, odds are they're working in the stables. Those employees will continue to be engaged, even though horse

racing doesn't actually start until April. We know that there are year-round jobs and that they will be able to continue that work, although they'll have to go through the appropriate security clearances because they'll be behind security.

Mr. Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition has a further supplemental.

C. James: I find it unbelievable that, as always, this government points fingers somewhere else. Now they're pointing fingers at the workers and their families for raising genuine concern about losing their jobs.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

C. James: These workers approached us because they're concerned for themselves and their families. I want this minister to know that every member on this side of the House is going to continue to raise these issues on behalf of those workers and their families.

These are 750 workers at GM Place who support sports year-round, year after year. They work at Canucks games. They're more than able to work for the Olympics. But this government and VANOC won't tell them or anyone else whether they're going to keep their jobs.

Again to the minister: can he explain why the B.C. Liberals spend billions of dollars on the Olympics but can't tell 750 hard-working British Columbians whether they'll have a job for a month during the Olympics?

Hon. C. Hansen: There is only one person I'm pointing a finger at, and that's the Leader of the Opposition, because her comments are shameful.

There is going to be a huge demand in British Columbia for anybody that has experience in the food and beverage and hospitality industries. There are going to be tens of thousands of additional jobs during February of 2010. I can guarantee the Leader of the Opposition that if anybody has that kind of experience and wants to work during 2010, during the Olympic period, I know that the Restaurant and Food Services Association is going to help facilitate those workers to be in jobs.

I have no doubt that the 750 workers at GM Place will be in demand for many of those jobs in those services and the great experience that they bring with them.

S. Simpson: Mr. Speaker, what's reckless and irresponsible in this House is this minister's incompetent bungling of this file. I suppose it's a good thing that the Restaurant and Food Services Association is stepping up, because this government has turned its back on all those workers.

This Premier and this minister have a responsibility to 750 people at GM Place who work hard, pay taxes,

expect to be able to work through that time at their jobs and are getting nothing from this government.

Will the minister stand up today and commit that those people will keep their jobs during the Olympics?

Hon. C. Hansen: Actually, I think what I'm hearing coming from this member for Vancouver-Hastings is the height of hypocrisy.

[1405]

When Great Canadian Casino Co. proposed creating those jobs at Hastings Park with the installation of slots, that member opposed it. That member opposed those jobs.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Continue, Minister.

Hon. C. Hansen: VANOC is as anxious as anyone is to make sure that there is continuity in food service at GM Place throughout the games. Those arrangements are being worked on. There are discussions that will take place, and as I said in my earlier answer, given the demand that there is for experienced food and beverage workers in February of 2010, I have no doubt that every single one of those employees that wants to work is going to have opportunities on their doorstep.

Interjections.

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

S. Simpson: Well, maybe if some of those workers at GM Place had a friend with a corporate jet to fly the Premier off to Beijing, this minister might pay a little more attention to them.

This minister's performance is shameful. What this minister has done is turned his back on 750 workers. At some point here, it's \$20 million for GM Place for what they do, it's a corporate jet for the Premier to fly around, and not one whit of care for those 750 workers. Stand up for people in British Columbia. Stand up for those workers and guarantee their jobs.

Hon. C. Hansen: No amount of bluster from this member is going to cover up his hypocrisy in that he opposed the creation of those jobs at Hastings Park from the get-go. We also know that the NDP opposed the Olympics from the get-go.

We are talking about \$10 billion of economic activity. We're talking about the creation of about 244,000 jobs in British Columbia because of the Olympics. It's about time that this member and his colleagues stopped bashing the Olympics and get on board with the rest of British Columbians who are counting down, over the

next 11½ months, to the biggest celebration that this province will ever see.

H. Bains: Quite frankly, the people of this province are sick and tired of this minister's non-answers. They're sick and tired of this minister pointing fingers at everyone else and accusing anyone who asks any questions. That's shameful.

It is shameful that with only a year to go, hundreds of these workers don't know whether they have jobs or not. Will this minister stand up today and tell these workers whether they will have jobs during the Olympics or not?

Hon. C. Hansen: I will tell the member what British Columbians are sick and tired of. They're sick and tired of this member constantly bashing the Olympics. They are sick and tired of the kind of fearmongering that we are hearing from the Leader of the Opposition and other members of the NDP caucus.

It's about time that the members of the official opposition got in touch with the rest of British Columbia and started to be supportive, encouraging for these workers, and helped to support them as they get ready for the biggest event that's ever going to happen in British Columbia.

[1410]

Interjections.

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

H. Bains: If you're a corporate Olympic sponsor, your tickets are guaranteed. The only guarantee the workers of GM Place and Hastings Park have is getting a pink slip from this government.

My question is to the minister. Why can't B.C. Liberals treat working people with a little bit of respect? Will you allow them to work? Is that too much to ask of this arrogant minister?

Hon. C. Hansen: I would ask of this member to show those workers a little respect.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: If the other members want to engage in question period, just keep going back and forth.

Continue, Minister.

Hon. C. Hansen: What would be respectful to these workers is if this member would not constantly fear-monger by saying that people are getting pink slips.

Nobody is getting pink slips. We know of 200 workers at Hastings Park who may not be working at that particular location for the month of February. We also know that their employer is working with them to see if they can be accommodated at other facilities, and there are other employers that are willing to step up to the plate and provide job opportunities for these experienced workers during that period of time.

But it is the height of disrespect, actually, when this member, that Leader of the Opposition and these members of the NDP caucus continue to spread fear among workers that is absolutely unfounded and unnecessary.

ROLE OF PATRICK KINSELLA IN B.C. RAIL SALE

L. Krog: Can the Premier confirm that his friend Patrick Kinsella, the chair of the 2001 and 2005 B.C. Liberal campaigns, received an untendered contract from B.C. Rail in 2002 to smooth the way for the sell-off of B.C. Rail?

Hon. W. Oppal: The member well knows that the issue relating to B.C. Rail is before the Supreme Court of British Columbia, and we will not comment on the matter.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

L. Krog: Perhaps the Attorney General and the Premier didn't hear what I had to say. The documents aren't before the courts. They're, in fact, available up there in the Legislative Library. If the Attorney General or the Premier has some knowledge about them and something that indicates that this matter is before the courts, perhaps they'd care to tell the House here today.

B.C. Rail's audited financial statements show \$297,000 in payments to Mr. Kinsella over the period of the B.C. Rail privatization scheme. Patrick Kinsella's specialty is working the back rooms.

My question is to the Premier. Who was Patrick Kinsella lobbying on behalf of the government during the sale of B.C. Rail? It wasn't the federal government. It wasn't the municipal government. Will the Premier tell us: who was Mr. Kinsella paid to talk to, and what did he tell them?

Hon. W. Oppal: I don't know if this member realizes it or not, but there are people who are on trial before the Supreme Court of British Columbia right now.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Take your seat, Attorney.
Continue.

Hon. W. Oppal: Irresponsible comments of that sort jeopardize a fair trial. That member well realizes that commenting in this arena about the trial that's before the Supreme Court jeopardizes the right to a fair trial.

R. Fleming: Very simply, we're asking questions about items that aren't in evidence. They're in the parliamentary library just down the hall from here. We're asking questions about a secret untendered contract worth \$300,000 awarded to the Premier's friend, Mr. Patrick Kinsella, to help sell B.C. Rail — a secret untendered contract to the author of the Premier's 2001 election platform, which, you'll recall, promised not to sell B.C. Rail. Don't the people of British Columbia deserve to know the truth about this payment — a payment that broke the rules and has been kept secret for six years?

My question is to the Premier. Who did Mr. Kinsella lobby in this regard? What did he tell them? Tell us what Mr. Kinsella's role was in the B.C. Rail sell-off.

Hon. W. Oppal: The fact that the documents are now available in the public library, in the library here in the Legislature, is irrelevant. The fact is that they were before the courts. They were secured as a result of being in the courts.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Continue, Attorney.

Hon. W. Oppal: I'm quite prepared to give the members opposite lectures on the doctrine of separation of powers. In the meantime, I'm not going to comment on anything that's before the Supreme Court or has been before the Supreme Court or has been connected to the trial that's before the Supreme Court.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplementary.

R. Fleming: These filings, the evidence of this contract that is in the parliamentary library, are because the Financial Administration Act was violated. This is information that should have been available to the public for six years, since those contracts were awarded, and they never were, by B.C. Rail — on line or in any other source.

Here's what we know now. The government broke the rules to give the campaign chair of this party, the governing party, and their chief fundraiser a \$300,000 contract to help smooth the B.C. Rail privatization.

Just what did this key Liberal official know? He's known for his lobbying and not calling it lobbying. What did he do for his money? That's the question today to the Premier. Will he tell British Columbians the truth? Will he tell why his government paid Mr. Patrick Kinsella \$300,000 to help sell off B.C. Rail?

Hon. W. Oppal: The fact that the documents are now available is not relevant. The fact is that they have been in evidence.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Continue, Attorney.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. W. Oppal: The documents relating to B.C. Rail have been the subject of a decision by Madam Justice Bennett of the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

J. Horgan: Well, let me help the Attorney out. I know he's always keen to solicit my advice. The financial statements for B.C. Rail, a Crown entity, tell us, the legislators of this place, that the chief bagman for the Premier and his political party received an untendered contract for \$300,000. What did he do for the \$300,000? That, surely, is not before the courts.

[1420]

Hon. W. Oppal: The fact is that all of this matter is related to what's before the Supreme Court. The subject of the B.C. Rail litigation is before the Supreme Court of British Columbia, and I'm not going to comment on it.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

J. Horgan: Well, we do know something about Mr. Kinsella's expertise. In his own resumé to the state of Washington, he suggests that he has experience with a company called Accenture by providing inroads to the government to privatize one-third of B.C. Hydro. He has experience with Alcan, another company familiar to the Premier and his colleagues, which received a pretty sweet deal for electricity purchase and power sales during the tenure of this government. So that's Mr. Kinsella's expertise.

Why would B.C. Rail, which is identified in the platform of the current government as not for sale, pay this guy 300 grand? What's the deal with that? Why is that not appropriate questioning in the Legislature of British Columbia?

Hon. W. Oppal: I'll repeat my answer. The issues relating to B.C. Rail are very much before the Supreme Court of British Columbia, and we're not going to comment on that.

M. Farnworth: The Attorney General stands here in this House and says he's prepared to lecture, you know, on "before the courts." Well, one thing he's still going to

get, no matter how many lectures he does, is a failing grade on openness and accountability on this issue.

These documents were not before the courts. They're in the Legislative Library. They've always been in the Legislative Library, and they have not been before the courts. My question to the Premier is: what was Mr. Kinsella doing for \$300,000? Stand and answer that question. Why was he paid \$300,000?

Hon. W. Oppal: The issue of accountability and alleged wrongdoings relating to all documents, whether they are before the court now, whether they have been released for the court, are all linked to B.C. Rail. All of those matters are before the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

MEAT INDUSTRY REGULATIONS

C. Wyse: I spent the past few days meeting with representatives of the meat-processing industry. They are concerned that this government is clueless about their industry. They are facing extremely challenging economic times, made more difficult by regulations enacted by this government.

This is the question they would like this government to answer. Can the minister confirm that this government has no idea how many meat animals are produced in this province, no idea where and what they are and no idea how much slaughter capacity is needed to service them?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. M. Polak: When we made the transition to the new meat inspection regulations, we recognized that there would be challenges for industry to make that transition. That's why we provided \$8.8 million to the industry. That, by the way, is funding that those members voted against.

I'm pleased to say that while we still have challenges, we have managed to quadruple the number of licensed provincial meat-processing plants since this has come into place in 2004.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

[1425]

C. Wyse: I don't think that answer is going to help Mike Noullett of Kawano Farms near Prince George, who told me how much money he spent — tens of thousands of dollars — to meet the government's new meat industry regulations. Now he is struggling to stay in business, because the ministry is letting other processors in the same area play by different rules — all this after the former Agriculture Minister used Kawano Farms as a

photo shoot, announcing how well the new regulations are working.

Increased costs are forcing Musa Ismail of Pitt Meadow Meats and Richard Yntema of Valley Wide Meats in Enderby out of business. If these processors go out of business, meat producers in these regions will go under as well.

Your government created these problems in this industry. What are you doing to fix them?

Hon. M. Polak: First of all, this member ought to make up his mind which policy he supports. In this House just last week that member raised a concern about a licence that was not granted. Why? Because the person applying for the licence was within the 100-kilometre limit near another facility.

So which is it? Does the member think that we ought to protect those producers who have invested in coming up to the new standards? They've invested tens of thousands — sometimes in the neighbourhood of a hundred thousand dollars and more — into facilities that they've now brought up to standard.

We now have amended the regulations to protect those producers. This member advocated against that. Now he wants us to change the rules. I'm not sure what he thinks.

[End of question period.]

Hon. J. McIntyre: I seek leave to add to my introduction.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Introductions by Members

Hon. J. McIntyre: I'm sorry I neglected to mention Gwen Harry, who is also here with the Squamish Nation, a 12-year-old. Her namesake, of course, is Gwen Harry, the Squamish elder, so I know that she has a wonderful model to follow in life. I would like to welcome Gwen as well.

M. Sather: I seek leave to present a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Petitions

M. Sather: I have a petition signed by 468 residents calling on the government to come to assistance of both workers and consumers regarding the closure of Extra Foods in Maple Ridge.

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

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Introductions by Members

H. Bains: In the House we have a very active member, a firefighter from Surrey. Not only is he involved in the health and safety of his members, but he's also deeply involved in the community, whether it's the food bank or anything else. Tim Baillie is in the House. Please welcome Tim Baillie to this House.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: I call continued second reading of Bill 4.

Second Reading of Bills

MINISTERIAL ACCOUNTABILITY BASES ACT, 2008-2009 (continued)

D. Routley: Observing the theme of question period, I'd like to rename Bill 4, the Ministerial Accountability Bases Act, to be the "Ministerial accountability debase-ment act." As we can clearly see by the record of this government, they take every step possible, every measure within their reach, to lessen their accountability to the people of B.C., whether it be the cancellation of sittings or this kind of an act, which gives a duck-and-cover to the many ministers who have seen their ministerial budgets go over budget.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

It's clear that the original act and the holdback of bonuses was an absolutely political gesture. Since the capital won by that political gesture has worn off, they've lost interest, and they've lost interest in a very big way. Year after year we've seen the introduction of acts like these that give permission to these ministers, in a retro-active way, to overspend their budgets without losing that holdback.

So it's with some sadness, I think, that all the members are called back to the Legislature to debate bills that give the government a free pass on its own budget laws. This one here confirms all of that.

[1430]

We saw this government take over, in 2001, the largest surplus in the history of the province at that time, \$1.48 billion. That's what they were left by the previous NDP administration. Through their mismanagement, their cold-hearted cuts to people at the same time they gave away the wealth of this province, we saw deficits from 2001 to 2003 — three deficits in a row. Then, during an unprecedented boom in resource prices and building rates in the United States, we saw the government post and take credit for four surpluses.

Now, as the worm turns and the economy suffers, we see the government prepare for a deficit and a deficit next year as well — two more deficits. That puts their record at five in the red and four in the black, and it looks very much like 2008 may in fact have been a deficit budget as well.

If that's true, if that comes to be true once the Auditor General reports, they will have a six-deficit, four-surplus record — the great managers, the fiscal wizards who managed to pass an absolutely politically driven law which saw their ministers hold back 20 percent of their pay. And not one of them ever gave up the 10 percent penalty that would have been incurred for going over budget.

During this time, this unprecedented building boom in the United States which accounted for their surplus years, we saw deficits grow in this province. We saw a deficit that was represented in poverty numbers. This province led the country in child poverty for the past six years running.

Rates were decreasing for years and years. Every year poverty rates in this province declined until this government took over, and then they started to climb again until we now, very sadly, lead this country — if you can call that leadership — in poverty rates among children.

We see deficits in housing as they stopped providing housing support for British Columbians in order to paper over their broken promise of 5,000 long-term care beds, redirecting federal housing money towards assisted living in order to make up for that broken promise.

The NDP built housing through the '90s, even though the federal government didn't supply any support for that. The federal government re-entered the social housing support game in 2002. Did this government respond by directing that to the people who were on our waiting list? No. They redirected that money every year to cover that broken promise.

The other deficits we've seen grow during those times. Seniors care — seniors reside in an absolute deficit of adequate care. Child care — we've seen a loss of space. Classrooms — our classrooms are overcrowded. Our schools have been closed. Those are the deficits imposed on British Columbia by this government even while they reported surpluses in their budgets. Emergency rooms. Forest policies that saw tens of thousands of workers lose their jobs during boom times in the United States.

They took a made-in-North-America housing boom and coupled it with a made-in-B.C. poverty boom. That's their record. Yet what do they do? They call us back to the Legislature now to amend their own legislation on budgeting and to pass this Bill 4, which gives permission to their ministers to overspend their budgets.

They were warned. They were warned this downturn was coming. But again, through political necessity and expediency, they chose not to listen — a government that doesn't listen to anyone, a government that ignores the facts because of the political inconvenience of acknow-

ledging reality. A government just like George Bush, which thinks it can create reality simply by insisting upon it. The more unreal their insistence becomes, the more insistent they become.

You can't have it both ways. You're accountable, or you're not, and this government is not accountable. This is one more duck-and-cover piece of legislation, one more evasion from the scrutiny of British Columbians. This is a retroactive righteousness that allows their ministers to overspend budgets, which they had agreed would be penalized 10 percent for doing just that.

This government denies the truth. They simply insist that everyone else is wrong, and if they're wrong, they think they can just change the rules. It's simple, really. If you're wrong, you just change the measurement. If you're wrong, you just change the law. This government has consistently shown that as its track record.

[1435]

During boom times, we saw a dying forest industry, and that was all good. During boom times, we saw increased poverty, and that was all good. During boom times, we saw the buildup of more debt, and that was all good. Now that the economy has turned and the ministers can't meet their budgets, we'll just give them more. We'll amend the law, and that's all good.

You just make it up as you go. You make it up as you must, and you remake it as you must. Last year the Accountability Bases Act encompassed seven ministries. Seven ministries went over budget. Last year was a time before government revenues were drastically affected by the downturn in the economy. Those ministries were Advanced Education; Environment; Finance; Health; Tourism, Sport and the Arts; Forests and Range; and Public Safety and Solicitor General. It was the fifth year in a row that it was necessary to pass such legislation — the fifth year.

This year I guess inflation has had its effect, because ten ministries are affected: Advanced Education and Labour Market Development; Community Development; Finance and the Minister Responsible for the Olympics; Forests and Range; Health Services; Housing and Social Development; Labour and Citizens' Services; Public Safety and Solicitor General; Tourism, Culture and the Arts; and Transportation and Infrastructure. All those ministries are over budget, and all those ministers, if they were to obey their own law, should be forfeiting 10 percent of their pay, half the holdback.

That was the deal. That's what this Liberal government waved a flag over. They waved and waved, and they said: "You know what? We're going to be accountable. We're going to ensure it, because we're actually going to penalize ourselves if we're not — although if we are found to be over budget, we can always maintain our accountability by just changing the rules."

That's what they did. Five years in a row we've seen it. Five years in a row, rather than acknowledge the

truth, the government comes and changes and alters the truth, alters reality. They say: "No, we didn't mean it. We meant something else. We're going to change that one, and everybody is still within the rule." Well, they're not. They're simply not. They're simply not accountable. They simply don't care whether their words mean anything, and this is one more proof that that is true.

I thank you for the opportunity to speak about Bill 4, to speak against it, to say that this government owes this province accountability, that it bragged and beat a drum, and this is what we got.

Hon. M. de Jong: To the members who participated in the discussion around Bill 4, I've listened, as I always do, to the comments with care. I should say this. I appreciated very much the efforts some of the members made to try to apply some sort of rational analysis, at least to a part of the discussion.

I am thinking of the members that posed, I think, the appropriate question around the circumstances giving rise to the need for this legislation and also responsibly, at least to my mind, highlighted the fact that circumstances arise like fire seasons, like natural disasters, that give rise to the need for additional expenditures.

I think you can tell a lot about the nature of an individual by the manner in which they apply themselves to the task of criticism and critique. I listened to the comments of the last member who spoke for the opposition, and they were not dissimilar from some of the other commentary we heard.

[1440]

I don't want to take a lot of time, but I think it bears pointing out and placing on the record that apparently this member believes that a government, a minister and a ministry that perform their statutory duties as they relate to fighting forest fires should be penalized.

That's fine. If that's his and his colleagues' position and argument, then that's fine, but he should have the fortitude, the courage and the honesty to say so explicitly and not wrap that argument in rhetoric.

He and some of his colleagues apparently believe that whoever the Minister of Public Safety is, in a year when there is flooding that requires statutory expenditures, that individual should be penalized for performing their statutory duties. I disagree.

That was not the intention of the original piece of legislation that actually gives rise to the debate and discussion we are having this year and have had in past years. We wouldn't, of course, be having any of these discussions had the party opposite remained in power because, of course, none of these obligations ever existed under the party opposite.

So let me say on the record that I don't think officials, individuals who respond as the law requires them to, to ensure that there are resources to address natural disaster

and forest fires should be penalized. But I understand that the member opposite from Cowichan and some of his colleagues.... I want to say "some of his colleagues," because a few of his colleagues actually quite fairly pointed out the distinction. I appreciate that, and I respect that.

I must say that I am not sympathetic to the rhetoric and argument that I heard from the member from Cowichan and some of his colleagues. The characterization that we heard from him and most of his colleagues that spoke, of course, fails again to take into account what has exactly taken place here.

This chamber approves a budget. Happily, over the better part of the last eight years, as the fiscal year has drawn to a close, through both the power of a thriving economy and prudent fiscal management, the government has found itself in possession of additional resources and has chosen to put those resources to work on behalf of the people of British Columbia, the people that pay them in the first place.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

The member and a number of his colleagues believe that individuals should be punished for that as well — all right? It's instructive. It is instructive to know that. That was not the purpose of the legislation — to punish individuals for decisions that are made at a corporate level to take advantage of additional resources that are available.

It is not, I should say in fairness to the member and others, a dilemma that confronted the NDP administration because, of course, I can't think of a time when they came to the end of their fiscal year with a surplus or moneys in excess of what they thought they would have. It was actually always the opposite. They had always overspent their budget.

There was always less money than they anticipated having at the end of the fiscal year, so the confusion that reveals itself in the commentary of the member from Cowichan and others is perhaps understandable, because it's simply not a circumstance, as a member of the NDP, that they would be familiar with or have to confront.

[1445]

The last thing I want to say.... Again, only one member of the opposition — and I'm obliged to him for doing so — pointed out that there is a second component to the principal legislation that this act deals with as it relates to fiscal responsibility, and that is the obligation of the government as a whole to table a balanced budget and the ramifications that flow in circumstances where that doesn't happen.

Well, it didn't happen this year, and we're not thrilled about that over on our side of the House because we think budget deficits are things to be avoided, and it was a difficult decision for us. It was a decision made difficult because we actually believe that governments, as a rule, should spend within their means.

There is, however, a relevance between the legislation before us, or the main body of the legislation, and that decision, because that budget — the budget before the House now — has been tabled. It does call at this point for a deficit, and members of the executive council will be punished, as it were, as a result. They will not receive their full allocation, and that's as it should be. That is in accordance with a law that this government passed and reflective of the importance we attach to prudent fiscal management and balanced budgets.

We're anxious to move out of any kind of a deficit situation. We have a plan in place that would see that happen over the course of three years. What I find a bit remarkable, and I'll take this one opportunity to place this on the record.... We voted, in amending the balanced budget legislation, for a specific amendment. We committed to balancing the budget in the third year, returning to a balanced budget. But, and I want to give the opposition this degree of credit, so did they. So did they.

I wonder how members of the opposition, as they stand up and pontificate sanctimoniously about the legislation before us now, are reconciling the vote they cast just a number of weeks ago pledging to balance the budget in the third year with the promises they are now making and the whispers we are beginning to hear from members of the opposition and the NDP that we're going to have, if they ever had an opportunity, a much larger deficit, and it wouldn't be balanced. The budget wouldn't be balanced in the third year. So I have listened with great interest to the sanctimony....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.
Continue, Minister.

Hon. M. de Jong: I actually did listen with interest to what members of the opposition said. Believe me, I didn't like all of it, didn't agree with all of it, but I listened. And if members are having difficulty with that concept, I don't doubt for a moment that they are uncomfortable having someone point out the inconsistency between, on the one hand, voting in favour of a specific pledge to do something, and then ever since that date, speaking in terms that run directly contrary to fulfilling that pledge.

But we'll have lots of time over the weeks ahead to canvass that more fully, both in this House and elsewhere, as the province heads towards a general election on May 12.

[1450]

I guess I should, just for the record, emphasize in this House that although I was intrigued by the offer and the request from representatives of the opposition NDP seeking to cancel the election or postpone it, I want to assure all members that we on this side of the House are anxious to give British Columbians an opportunity to assess the choices that are available to them.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Continue, Minister.

Hon. M. de Jong: Well, I'm sorry I brought it up. But, of course, I didn't bring it up. The member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge brought it up. The member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge said that the first option the government should consider is postponing the election, and he purported to be speaking for a number of his colleagues. I'm not sure whether it was an interesting, odd observation to come from the opposition benches, but nonetheless, there it is.

Thanks, but no thanks. Ready or not, we intend to give British Columbians, as we pledged to do eight years ago, an opportunity to cast a vote in a predictable way on May 12.

Again, I thank members for their comments. They have heard mine, and with that, I move second reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

Hon. M. de Jong: I move the bill be referred to a Committee of the House for consideration at the next sitting after today.

Bill 4, Ministerial Accountability Bases Act, 2008–2009, read a second time and referred to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration at the next sitting of the House after today.

Hon. M. de Jong: I call committee stage of Bill 5.

Committee of the Whole House

SUPPLY ACT (No. 1), 2009

The House in Committee of the Whole on Bill 5; H. Bloy in the chair.

The committee met at 2:52 p.m.

On section 1.

B. Ralston: The section refers to the main estimates, and in the introduction of the estimates, there's also a document called the *Supplement to the Estimates*, which sets out greater detail in terms of what spending might be authorized. It's done in accordance with what are called standard objects of expense, which is an accounting term.

So I'm wondering if section 1, by referring to the main estimates, is also referring to the *Supplement to the Estimates*. Or is it simply the main estimates?

Hon. C. Hansen: Main estimates.

B. Ralston: The main estimates and the *Supplement to the Estimates* appear to be integrally related. Certainly, the main estimates really provide simply an overview of each ministry, whereas the *Supplement to the Estimates* provides more detailed spending in each ministry.

Given that the approval that's being sought here is to spend $\frac{5}{12}$ of the calendar year, a sum close to \$13.5 billion, I'm sure the public might be comforted by the fact that there was that limitation on proposed spending that's set out in the *Supplement to the Estimates*. So can the minister explain why the decision was made in drafting the bill not to include the *Supplement to the Estimates* as part of this bill?

Hon. C. Hansen: This is in keeping with the tradition of interim supply.

B. Ralston: Well, traditions are fine, and we sometimes celebrate them. And sometimes they lose their purpose, or they're unexamined. Is the minister saying: "We did it this way just because it's always been done this way"? Or is the minister saying that it was a reasoned, principled decision to include a reference to the main estimates here and deliberately and thoughtfully to exclude the *Supplement to the Estimates*?

[1455]

Hon. C. Hansen: I'll just remind the member that we are discussing the interim supply bill. We are not discussing the *Supplement to the Estimates*. The member will know that during the regular course of supply in the House, the *Supplement to the Estimates* is provided as guidance. It is the main estimates that actually get voted on and approved in this House through the normal course of the budget approval process, but that is not what we are here to discuss today. We are here to discuss interim supply.

B. Ralston: Well, let me just read from the estimates document, which the minister has and I have. It says: "While section 23(4) of the Financial Administration Act authorizes the spending of an appropriation on any activity or STOB" — and that stands for standard object of expense, the accounting term I referred to earlier — "this more detailed presentation provides additional information and establishes a framework for administrative control by Treasury Board."

It seems to me that, obviously, the two are integrally linked. It provides a framework for administrative control by Treasury Board, and this is not me saying this. This is what's included in the document the minister has tabled.

So I'm wondering why that administrative framework for control of spending isn't part of what we're passing here. It seems to be somewhat looser than it might otherwise be by simply adding the addition of the *Supplement to the Estimates* as part of the basis on which this legislation goes forward.

Hon. C. Hansen: During the normal budget process, it is the main estimates that are approved by this chamber. The *Supplement to the Estimates* is provided as guidance. They are part of an internal budgeting process, but that information is made available at the time the budget documents are tabled and the main estimates are tabled. As I said before, that is not what we're here to debate today. We're here to debate interim supply.

The Chair: Member, and if you could direct your questions to the interim supply for Bill 5.

B. Ralston: Bill 5. I thought we were on.... Well, Ministry of Environment is one bill off, but that's probably not a surprise.

I'm referring here to the language of the statute that's proposed: "...the total amount of the votes of the main Estimates for the fiscal year..." Can the minister then explain the legislative authority that's being granted here? If we remove — as he said he wishes and the Chair has directed — the *Supplement to the Estimates* as a framework for that spending, what is the resulting control on spending that we achieve by passing this statute in the form that it's drafted?

Hon. C. Hansen: The member is not correct. We have not removed the *Supplement to the Estimates*. The *Supplement to the Estimates* has never been part of an interim supply process. So what governs the spending for this $\frac{5}{12}$ of the year are the votes as set out in the main estimates.

B. Ralston: Well, I thank the minister for that correction. Perhaps it's the way in which I phrased it. Given that we're not — because of the position in which we find ourselves in the calendar — going to have debate on main estimates ministry by ministry, it seems to me that the *Supplement to the Estimates* provides additional parameters and guidance and controls on spending.

So I'm wondering, I appreciate what the minister said about the ordinary circumstance, but in this circumstance, does he not see that necessity and would he in this case consider an amendment to include votes of the main estimates and include in section 1 a reference to the *Supplement to the Estimates*?

Hon. C. Hansen: In keeping with the practice of this House, the answer is no.

[1500]

B. Ralston: Well, I certainly try to learn parliamentary tradition and have some respect for it, but a simple reflexive answer that that's not the way we do it here....

I think it bears a closer examination, and I'm inviting the minister to give a more reasoned response than simply: "Well, we do it that way, and that's the end of it." That may be a satisfactory answer in some cases. I don't

think that's a satisfactory answer when we're talking about the spending of \$13.4 billion.

Hon. C. Hansen: As I explained earlier, the *Supplement to the Estimates* is presented for information. It is part of an internal financial management process within government. Those allocations to STOBs are used very aggressively in terms of managing budget expenditures within ministries and across government generally, but it is not part of the normal budget approval process, never mind the interim supply.

The Chair: Member, if you could direct your questions to the Supply Act that we're doing at the present and limit it to the information that's laid out.

B. Ralston: Well, we're debating proposed section 1. I'm referring to the words of the proposed statute "...total amount of the votes of the main Estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2010..." I'll attempt to frame my question in a way that arises out of that, because that's certainly my intention.

Given what the minister has said, is he prepared to commit here today that the spending — should this bill pass — will be confined to the STOBs that are set out in the *Supplement to the Estimates* and that there will be no spending outside that administrative framework, which is there to assist Treasury Board in spending?

Hon. C. Hansen: What this will commit to is the votes as set out in the main estimates.

B. Ralston: I thank the minister for that answer, but I don't think it was clear. Is the minister then saying no, he's not prepared to make that commitment?

Hon. C. Hansen: As I indicated earlier, it would be inappropriate.

Section 1 approved.

On section 2.

B. Ralston: I'm looking at what's referred to in section 2(a) as the "capital expenditures referred to in Schedule C of the main Estimates..." I'm not sure... I'll seek some guidance from the Chair. Perhaps I can pose my question first, and I can get some guidance from the Chair.

The financing transactions, capital expenditures, schedule C, as set out on page 197 of the main estimates. In there, there are a number of dollar amounts relating to different ministries. But some do jump out at one, and I'm going to pose a question.

If I pose the question, then I can wait for the Chair's ruling on this. In the Ministry of Attorney General,

it's proposed to spend \$690,000 on office furniture and equipment; the Minister of Children and Family Development, \$864,000 on office furniture and equipment; the Minister of Forests and Range, \$725,000 on office furniture and equipment; the Minister of Citizens' Services, \$437,000 on office furniture and equipment; and the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, \$489,000 on office equipment and furniture.

Given the general pronouncements that have been made about cutting government waste and a reduction in government waste and general tightening of expenditure, I'm wondering if the minister — if it's permitted — is willing to answer questions about what the basis is for that proposed capital expenditure on office furniture and equipment.

Hon. C. Hansen: The member's question is entirely legitimate, and the appropriate time for that would be during the estimates for these respective ministries. But we are here debating interim supply today.

The Chair: Member, the question should be directed. It's not to go into specific numbers within it, department by department.

B. Ralston: Okay, thank you. I appreciate that ruling from the Chair. I know the minister had a response, but I was seeking your guidance rather than his, because I know you'll be impartial.

[1505]

The Chair: It's not the mandate of the committee.

B. Ralston: Very well. Then the ambit of questions that I have to ask is really limited to.... Perhaps the Chair could rule as to what questions I'm entitled to ask, given that this is the expenditure of \$659 million.

The Chair: Member, if you would like ask questions that relate to the interim supply bill.

B. Ralston: I'm seeking your guidance because this is a section that proposes to spend according to a schedule. It's set out on financing transactions, capital expenditures for the next fiscal year. The bill asks for the sum of \$659.7 million to be disbursed. Given that I can't ask any questions about individual amounts, can the Speaker just guide me as to what questions I would be entitled to ask?

Hon. C. Hansen: You know, I find the member's point surprising, given that he's been a member of this House for almost four years. This is not the first interim supply bill that has been presented during the time he has been the Finance critic. I would have

thought that he understood the scope of an interim finance debate several years ago, never mind at this stage.

Mr. Chair, as is the tradition in this House, I am certainly prepared to answer high-level questions about this particular section. But it would be inappropriate for me to go into detailed analysis of how this appropriation would be spent ministry by ministry, because the place for that is in fact the estimates process.

As the member knows, the Government House Leader yesterday asked for a proposal from the opposition with regard to how it might facilitate us getting into the estimates process and getting that completed before the House dissolves for the election.

Given that what we have before us is interim supply, I'm certainly prepared to answer any questions the member has that are relevant and appropriate for an interim supply discussion during committee stage.

B. Ralston: Mr. Chair, I suppose I might have expected that rather high-handed lecture from the Minister of Finance. Regrettably, I did have a genuine question to ask of you, and I see he's chosen to answer it on your behalf. I'm a little bit disappointed in that.

Given the nature of this debate, I do have specific questions. Those are questions in individual ministries that I think would be appropriate to pursue. Since I'm not able to pursue them here, I don't have any further questions on this section.

Sections 2 to 4 inclusive approved.

Preamble approved.

Title approved.

Hon. C. Hansen: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 3:09 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

[1510]

Report and Third Reading of Bills

SUPPLY ACT (No. 1), 2009

Bill 5, Supply Act (No. 1), 2009, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

Hon. M. de Jong: I call continued debate on the budget.

Budget Debate

(continued)

G. Coons: It's a great privilege to stand before the House and give my interpretation of this government's budget.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

With only weeks to an election, we have a government that's promising to protect health care just like they did back in 2001 and 2005. But if we look at the budget that was put in front of us and look at the background of the budget.... You know, this government was warned about a downturn, but they apparently didn't listen. They didn't pay attention. They bring forth a budget that is basically a hidden budget and not really meeting the needs of British Columbians.

After eight years of service cuts, privatization and higher costs for average British Columbians, we know this government can't be trusted — the arrogance, the deliberate neglect of everyday families — and this budget proves that.

They cut and they hide, and there's nothing to help British Columbians through, whether it's first nations or families trying to pay their bills, whether it's seniors, students or forestry workers, those that live in rural British Columbia, those concerned about gas prices and the gas tax that this government has implemented, ferry fares skyrocketing.... We've just seen how out of touch and arrogant this government is.

The gas tax has doubled. They've cut environmental protection. Olympic security costs are still out there and unknown to us. Nothing for rural B.C. We've seen cuts to schools. Crime and safety — we've seen this budget cut that. Cuts to student assistance and nothing for seniors.

On health care they say: "Trust us." But British Columbians realize that this Premier, this government, hasn't earned that trust. He'll use this recession to cut and privatize like we've never seen before. They know the real budget and the big cuts will come with this government.

When push comes to shove, this government will still put their friends and pet projects ahead of the needs of everyday families and average British Columbians. The hidden agenda will cost us more while the wealthy and connected reap the benefits from this government.

We've seen salary increases for the Premier and the big executives stay. We've seen overruns for the pet projects. We've seen \$365 million for the stadium roof. That could have and should have gone to those in rural British Columbia who have been suffering through the past eight years — nothing, as I mentioned before, for rural B.C. and forest workers except cuts to the ministry.

The green economy was dropped by this Premier, although it was written on the back of a napkin — probably similar to this budget — out of nowhere. We've seen

cuts to the environment. Nothing to deal with hospital waiting lists or school closures. Cuts, as I mentioned before, to colleges and universities.

When we look at this government with their promise on protecting health and education, British Columbians see it as eight years too late. This government, this Premier, did nothing when the times were good. After eight years of the cuts and privatization, why would we believe that they'll change their course now? We'll just see more closures, more privatization and more cuts.

On protecting jobs, this government has been lost out there over the last year. Jobs have been disappearing over the last year in the forest industry, over 20,000 jobs — 68,000 jobs just last December in British Columbia. The Premier's record shows that British Columbians don't believe him and don't trust him. It's just an empty collection of broken promises and nothing to help British Columbians through tough times.

When I look at the north coast, the region I represent, which is Stewart, the Nass Valley, Prince Rupert, the villages outside Prince Rupert, Haida Gwaii, down the central coast — Klemtu, Bella Bella, Bella Coola — there's plenty that this budget could have offered them. But we haven't seen that.

[1515]

We haven't seen the need for the bridge to Ocean Falls, and we brought that up before. It's a provincially maintained bridge in Ocean Falls which collapsed last June. I've given them documentation on the necessity of that. So we hope that this bridge, which is a key link to the community and a safety issue, is one aspect of infrastructure that this government will put some of their funding towards.

We look at road paving. I'm getting lots of calls from the Queen Charlotte Islands. The road between Masset and Port Clements hasn't been paved for over 27 years, and it's been cancelled for the third year in a row. Again, looking at road maintenance and concerns within the riding where some of the infrastructure budget should be headed towards.

Sir Alexander Mackenzie School, their gym — the Minister of Education fully knows the concerns with that. We've been communicating, and she has assured us that they are aware of the flooding issues, and they will deal with the gym immediately. So we look forward in the Bella Coola Valley to working on this gym, the only facility in the valley that can accommodate the needs for everybody.

We start looking at the rec centre and swimming pool in Masset that was forced to close down. The regional district people and the people from the upper Island met with the Premier on this. They're looking for some positive movement towards the rec centre and the swimming pool on upper Haida Gwaii in the Masset area as well as the community hall in Sandspit. They have communicated with the government and ministries on that.

We can't forget the Port of Prince Rupert as we move forward. Obviously, everybody in the precinct knows

the importance of the Port of Prince Rupert, the closest network to the Asian market. Environmentally, it's the way to go.

When we start looking at the commitment from the government.... The Premier did commit when he was interviewed by the *Delta Optimist*. He was questioned about the Port of Prince Rupert and Deltaport, and he said: "We will treat all ports equally." I hope that as we move forward, that commitment comes through and that Prince Rupert will be treated as equally as the other ports in the province.

We have to get the agreement with the Coast Tsimshian on that, and we need to get all levels of government working toward that.

The local government has had a protocol for regional cooperation with the Gitxaala band, the Lax Kw'alaams band, the Hartley Bay band, the Metlakatla band and the city of Prince Rupert and the district of Port Ed where they developed a protocol for projects and issues that are important to the region.

I brought up on numerous occasions the Tsimshian access project, the fixed-link project. It's on the major inventories project of the Ministry of Economic Development. It has been there for many years.

I realize right now that there has been some shared funding between the partners and ministry for another feasibility study. I believe it's — don't quote me on this — the tenth or 12th in the last ten or 12 years. Another feasibility study — hopefully, that will generate what we need to do to push forward with that project.

On the north coast, ferries are a huge concern. I'll get into that in a little while. We're seeing skyrocketing fares. We're seeing the concerns with Transport Canada and the new regulations for safe manning. For example, the *Kwuna*, which goes between Skidegate and Sandspit — their passenger numbers have been reduced 75 percent from 150 to 30.

When a plane comes in, there's not enough crew on there to even get a planeload across, and you've got people waiting. They did in that region get a variance from Transport Canada. Between one and six it is safe to have 50 or 60 people on there, but after six o'clock, it's unsafe to have that number.

They had worked out something due to the airline schedules. But it's something that we as a government need to take seriously and look at what's happening with safe manning levels in communities along the coast to ensure that appropriate service levels are maintained and that people are communicated with.

[1520]

B.C. Ferries and this government knew for over eight years that these safe manning levels were coming into play. B.C. Ferries knew for 18 months that there were going to be significant changes, but no communications with their advisory committees, no communications with communities to look at it and try to problem-solve.

It was the very next day. "The regs are taking in, and this is what we have to do." Again, we brought up our major concerns about communications and where we need to go in that aspect.

I realize that it's been a while since we've had the budget debate, but I want to concentrate on something that the Minister of Tourism, Culture and the Arts talked about when he was referring to the budget debate. This is a quote: "When I think about the ordinary British Columbian — and we all, both sides of the House, talk about the ordinary, average British Columbian — I'm not sure who that person really is."

Well, I think that's the problem with that side of the House. They don't know who average families are, who the average British Columbian is. They don't communicate with them. They don't talk with them. They don't work with them.

We're talking about families who are struggling to make ends meet, living paycheque to paycheque, looking for some hope for the future — whether it's forestry that has been abandoned by this government, whether it's creating green jobs or green technology or whether their kids have been shortchanged by underfunding in our school system or in post-secondary where there are skyrocketing tuition costs. We just look at the costs being downloaded onto families — whether it's the gas tax, hydro or ferry fares.

Average British Columbians that look to the government for leadership — this government has failed them in the last eight years. This budget also fails them. It's families that want fairness and respect from their elected officials. They don't want contempt or arrogance or broken promises. And it's families that are concerned about homelessness in the province, where homelessness has increased by over 300 percent, something that we should be ashamed of.

We look at poverty, the growing gap between the rich and the poor. Child poverty — we keep bringing this up to no avail. Number one in child poverty for five straight years — not a record to be proud of. We look at the minimum wage. This government sticks to their mantra since 2001 of not helping the most disadvantaged with trying to make ends meet. We look at social assistance levels that need help. We have the highest average wealth in British Columbia, but we have the highest rate of poverty — 13 percent of our population.

If we look back and listen to what Gandhi said when he called child poverty the worst form of violence.... The worst form of violence is child poverty. Given that, this government and its arrogance, its out-of-touch policies and the hidden personal agendas are doing more and doing an immense amount of violence against our children.

We need to work on a poverty reduction strategy like other provinces. I believe five other provinces have had strategies to work on trying to counteract poverty, and that should be a priority for this government. When

we look at food banks, 78,000 British Columbians used food banks in the last couple of years, and one-third of those were children.

The gap between the rich and the poor has widened over the first decade, in the last eight or ten years. We have the highest overall rate of poverty, the highest rate of child poverty and the highest rate of working poor in this province. The income ratio gap between the richest and the poorest has increased from 10 to 1 to 14 to 1 from 1993 to 2006. The depth of the poverty that we're seeing is staggering.

We look at British Columbians. The average British Columbian in poverty in 2006 had an annual income of \$7,700 below the Stats Canada low-income cutoff. This affects single mothers of colour. It affects aboriginal women and families and recent immigrants. We need to have policies that look at countering the poverty that we have in this province.

[1525]

Getting back to average British Columbians, average British Columbians are those that are concerned about our ferries, our marine highway and the direction that this government is taking our marine highway in.

We've seen devastation to many coastal communities up and down the coast. I visited over 25 communities, talked to them and listened to their stories in the last year and a half. Since that time, we've seen fare increases skyrocketing. We've seen businesses — whether it's B and Bs.... We've seen tourism go down, restaurants in trouble, hotels....

These ferries are essential service. They're either work-related or school-related. We've seen fares skyrocket, and we're going to see another 7 percent-plus in April. We've seen fares skyrocketing and ridership going down. We've seen revenues going down, but we've seen expenses going up.

If you put those together, it looks like it's a perfect storm, and this government has washed their hands of our marine highway. Even though the minister responsible and the Premier and this side of the government think they've washed their hands of our marine highway — our ferry system — their fingerprints are all over this file, all over it.

If we look at long-term debt with B.C. Ferries, it's over \$1.4 billion of long-term debt with interest rates climbing and their payments climbing. If things don't improve, B.C. Ferries — I have to remind everybody that the sole shareholder is the B.C. taxpayers — will not only have to borrow money to raise cash for any new vessels. They will need to borrow to pay back their previous loans — the \$1.4 billion in loans and bonds that they've issued.

We start looking, as I mentioned before, at cuts in staff due to safe manning regulations. B.C. Ferries is very top-heavy in management, which has morphed over the last couple of years. There's been a 67 percent increase in management since 2001, with a 15 percent decrease in

workers. We've seen the CEOs' pay alone at least — and this was in 2006 — \$550,000.

The board of directors recently received hefty wage increases. There's a tourism centre being developed in downtown Vancouver — 2,700 square feet with unknown staffing, no prescribed mandate and an unknown price tag.

We look at the Canucks. You go to a Canucks game. What do you see? You see B.C. Ferries plastered over the boards. We see B.C. Ferries on the score clock. We see areas where we should be putting service versus other areas that I believe should be put to help ferry-dependent communities and those who live in them.

We find ourselves in this position due to this government's and this Premier's policies and their lack of leadership. Their privatization model, the Coastal Ferry Act was rammed through the Legislature in less than 24 hours, transferring over \$2 billion without a strategy. That's what we needed. The ferry advisory committee chairs recommended that we need not a reduction-in-service strategy but a ferry strategy that works for coastal communities.

We need to revamp the Coastal Ferry Act, as the opposition tried to do, to ensure there's transparency and accountability from the Premier. But it's difficult when the Premier and this government are afraid to face the realities of their own public policies and actions.

B.C. Ferries does not fall under freedom of information. It does not fall under the Ombudsman or the Auditor General to ensure this government is held accountable on how our \$170 million a year of taxpayer money is spent.

Those in coastal communities believe that the Premier and this government have broken the economic and social contract with those that depend on his promise of a safe, reliable and affordable ferry service.

One thing happening out there that I'm sure all members are interested in is the sinking of the *Queen of the North*. We're coming up to the third-year anniversary. We've seen nothing from this government. The day the ferry sank on March 22, the Premier — and I'll read this from broadcast news — was "promising a full and thorough investigation of the sinking of the *Queen of the North*."

[1530]

And what has he done? Washed his hands of this. In that time of three years we've had a couple of internal B.C. Ferries reports, and we've had the Transportation Safety Board report. The Transportation Safety Board report was a report that I was waiting for, to see what types of concerns we should look at with the sinking so that it would never happen again.

The TSB indicated that those on the bridge were not trained or qualified. There should have been three on the bridge, not two. There were alarms that warned about navigational concerns, and they were not set up or turned on. They had been disabled or turned off in the refit. So

the *Queen of the North* came back after a refit, and alarms were turned off that should have been turned on.

Now, because the Transportation Safety Board report was leaked a night early and massaged by somebody, most of the media went towards what happened during that 14 minutes. What were they doing on the bridge? Again, when we look at what happened, we know that there was no evacuation plan or procedure. The water-tight doors were open, and under regulations they're supposed to be closed. There was inadequate passenger safety training in their drills.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

The TSB report indicated that external and internal safety audits failed to be effective in identifying safety deficiencies. Eight times in the final report of the TSB it said that in one way or another, B.C. Ferry Services' action placed the vessel, its passengers and its crew at risk.

We need a full public inquiry. This government, this Premier, is afraid to enter that process. We have families that lost their loved ones. We have passengers that are forever having nightmares because of this. We have crew that deserve answers. We have a public that deserves answers on what happened that night, and this government has failed British Columbians in that.

The TSB on May 11, prior to doing their report, issued a safety advisory that went to the CEO of B.C. Ferries. It said and warned that "crew members on the bridge were not adequately trained, and that is the responsibility of management to ensure this. Training is part and parcel of management responsibility."

Now, that wasn't mentioned once in either one of B.C. Ferries' internal reports, but I think it's fairly significant. The CEO of B.C. Ferries actually called this advisory benign and said he "didn't know if he bought into it." Well, I think it's time that the Premier buys into having a public inquiry, a judicial inquiry, into the sinking of the *Queen of the North*.

We have many other questions. We have the allegations from B.C. Ferries safety director Darin Bowland, who resigned days after the sinking. This is what he said. This is from his statements. He warned that a catastrophic event would happen if management did not heed his warnings about safety. "The lack of qualified people to run the new equipment on the bridges was an accident waiting to happen." This was a month or so before the sinking.

We need to have answers. We need to know what happened. Five days after the sinking of the *Queen of the North*, what happened? There was an order from B.C. Ferries' management to remove and destroy records and purge documents, including ship-specific manuals from the *Queen of the North* — five days after the sinking. These are questions that need to be answered.

Darin Bowland basically said, and this is a quote from his report: "I believe that the lack of bridge resource management training might have been the cause, or one of the causes, of the sinking of the *Queen of the North*."

And what happened to Darin Bowland, the safety manager for B.C. Ferries? Two days or so after the sinking he was fired. He left. He tried a lawsuit, couldn't fight the corporation and has disappeared. But these are his statements. So I believe that this government and this Premier need to take the high road, take a stand and have a thorough, public judicial inquiry into the sinking.

Now, getting back to average British Columbians. Average British Columbians are those who are trying to make ends meet. They're worried about our ferry system. They're worried about our education system.

[1535]

This Liberal government is so out of touch with what's happening in education. The Minister of Education keeps spouting that she's providing the highest level of funding ever, but basically her mantra is not felt in rural districts. We've seen 177 schools close. We've seen seismic upgrades not started and even more schools being closed across the province.

The education budget is a huge hit against parents and students. The minimum increase that they've put in the budget — I believe it's 1.2 percent, which is about \$62 million — doesn't even cover the collective agreements coming up in the next couple of months, nor does it even look at inflation costs. So once again we're going to see education being hit with the full force of this government.

You know, both the throne speech and budget failed to come through for children and education despite the Premier's statements and promises that funding for health and education was going to be protected — nothing to alleviate child poverty or improve learning conditions for students.

The minimum wage remains unchanged. Other areas of social services are going to be slashed by this government, including and increasing the problems that teachers face every day. There is nothing about oversized classrooms or the lack of support for students with special needs. Nothing's been done for rural communities in this way, and the budget for education contains nothing for any improvement.

The so-called increase, as I mentioned, is set at about \$60 million. It does not cover inflation. It will not cover salary increases. Boards of education have already been told to find \$12 million in administrative wage cuts. That's only the beginning. What students, what teachers, what parents will again see are these Liberal cuts when this year starts next September.

During times of economic difficulty, poorer families and children that come from poorer families get hit the hardest. We already know that one in five students in British Columbia lives in poverty. There are no targets to end the poverty.

This budget, basically, is just a broken promise to students, parents and teachers. There are more overcrowded classrooms than there were back in 2005 and 2006. There's no plan to reduce class size or improve support for children with special needs and their families. There are more than 3,300 classes with 30 or more students and 11,000 classes with four or more students with special needs. A real failure of this budget is for students, and especially students with special needs, across the province.

Again, we have the average British Columbian, just to reiterate back to the Minister of Tourism, concerned about advanced education and post-secondary. What we've seen from this government is that the policies they've introduced basically seem to discourage people from attending university or colleges, rather than policies that assist them.

We've seen, under this Premier and this government, the greatest tuition fee increase in Canada. Since 2001 they've gone from just about \$2,500 to over \$5,000. This is the fastest increase in Canada, as a result of this government's policies, this government's arrogance, this government's deliberate neglect of everyday families and average British Columbians.

As a result of this government's policies, B.C. student debt has gone from the lowest to the second-highest in Canada. This is one of the biggest barriers to post-secondary education, that student debt. This government and this Premier eliminated student grants, just another slash-and-hit to those that depend on post-secondary.

Average British Columbians also include forest workers and their families and those that rely on our forest industry. What have we seen from this government over the years? They've abandoned forest communities. Every community in British Columbia has been affected by the forestry collapse, particularly those in rural B.C. We see it, we hear it, but we don't hear any answers or any solutions from that side of the House.

[1540]

We look at jobs lost in the forest industry, over 21,000 in the last two years. There are many stories and many concerns with what's happened. I've got a story here from Gary Weeks, who is a forestry worker who's looking for some transitional assistance. He says: "The forest industry and my family need assistance now, and this government has failed to put money into our forestry industry."

When we look at what else this government has failed to do, like log exports.... I hope this government learns from this side of the House and does something for the average British Columbian.

Hon. K. Krueger: It's my pleasure to rise in this House today to speak to the budget of 2009-2010, a budget that acknowledges and responds to the earthquake that is shifting the global economic landscape. It outlines

a sound plan to help British Columbians through difficult times, and it provides a vision that will enable us to come out of this stronger than before, ready to act on the many opportunities around us and on the horizon.

The economic crisis that we face today is a crisis of confidence on a global scale, and it has made its way from Wall Street to Bay Street and most recently to Main Street, British Columbia, and into the living rooms of British Columbia's families.

Anyone who has been paying attention knows that a lot of what goes on in economies is on the basis of whether people are feeling optimistic or pessimistic. Responsible leaders want to work to the optimism side of that scale. The negative, destructive, pessimistic attitude so often heard from one quarter in this Legislature is a disservice to the people those members were elected to represent.

I celebrate the 2009-2010 budget for its strong message of hope. British Columbians need confidence right now. In the 1990s when British Columbians lost confidence, this province lost its most precious resource, its people, and particularly its young adults. People don't leave a province for reasons that are minor. They leave when they see no vision by the government of the day, and we certainly saw that in the sad decade of the '90s.

People lost confidence, and British Columbia saw a mass outward migration. Our youth packed up their belongings and followed their hopes for a future right out of British Columbia. There's no denying that 50,000 students have been lost from enrolment in the kindergarten-to-grade-12 system because their parents left British Columbia. Our young people in the '90s made the painful and difficult decision to leave their towns, their families and their province because the government of the day had no vision.

Those members repeatedly make false claims both about how they did in that sad and dismal decade and the economic miracle that has happened since they were turfed from office. The NDP decade in government was a decade of waste, tragic waste — opportunities wasted, public money wasted. The debacle of the so-called fast ferries tied up like monuments to misery and incompetence at the foot of Lonsdale.

A decade when debt grew massively. Debt was doubled for British Columbia. In 125 years of governments.... The debt that existed at the time the NDP came to office was doubled in ten years, leaving British Columbians paying interest on that debt when we had to fix the mess. Interest was the third-largest expenditure of the provincial government of British Columbia. Health care first, education second and interest third, dwarfing whole handfuls of other ministries' budgets combined.

A decade when time was wasted, a decade when relationships were squandered. The NDP Premiers of the day picked fights with all of our neighbours — with our country, Canada; with our best market, the USA; with

the provinces and states that share boundaries with us — trying to distract the public from their inadequacy and from the woeful consequences of their incompetence.

The member who spoke just before me talked about a road in his constituency that he says hasn't been paved in 27 years, never seeming to pause to realize that for ten of those years, his party was government.

[1545]

In the almost eight years now that the B.C. Liberals have been privileged to lead British Columbia, we have overcome so many of those deficits — deficits in road maintenance and rehabilitation, financial deficits, deficits in health care, deficits in staffing.

Imagine a government, a socialist government that listened to socialist economists who said to them that the problem in health care was too many health care professionals. So they never added any doctors to doctors in training, and they actually cut the number of nurses in training. British Columbians are still struggling to catch up on staffing our health care system. We've doubled the number of doctors in training since we've been in government. We've almost doubled the number of nurses in training, but it takes a while.

Those same members that are strident members of the party that brought that ruin on British Columbia berate our government for the problems that they created. British Columbians saw no future, and they saw no hope in the '90s. That's why they left, and that's why it's so important that people know that now British Columbia's economy is in the best position of any state or province in North America to weather this economic storm.

In the past seven years we've fixed the consequences of the reckless incompetence of the NDP, which shipwrecked our economy. We fixed many aspects of it, but we still deal with the deficits that they left behind. It hasn't been easy to fix that mess. We're proud to know and to be able to say that we've eliminated the \$7 billion in accumulated NDP deficits from the '90s.

Although no one likes to run a deficit, we're able to afford one presently in these tough economic times because of our sound fiscal management over the past seven years. We can afford to help workers and their families and every community in British Columbia through these difficult times.

The community development trust, announced in early 2008 with a \$129 million budget — which we received, like all other provinces, as a portion of a transfer from the federal government — has been a model of successful partnerships. Now, the NDP are fond of saying: "Oh, that's federal money." Well, in the 1990s, as they were picking fights with the federal government and every other government around us, there weren't too many governments or parties of any kind that were friendly to making transfers to British Columbia.

I submit that British Columbia would be getting zero if the NDP were still government. But our Premier and

our government have worked hard on relationships, much to the benefit of British Columbians, including all those that the members opposite are supposed to represent. By collaborating now with industry, unions and non-profit organizations, we've been able to assist over 4,000 forest workers and their families in the first year of operating the community development trust.

We've kept hundreds of people working in the hard-hit communities of Mackenzie and Fort St. James, with \$4 million of direct assistance to create jobs for laid-off forest workers. In other communities we have agreements to create hundreds more jobs — jobs like the ones created in McLeod Lake, where 44 forest workers are restoring historic landmarks; and jobs like those in 100 Mile House, where 16 forest workers are reducing the risk of wildfires and improving forest health.

Through the community development trust we've also helped about 1,700 forest workers transition to retirement, leaving jobs for younger workers. We've helped close to 1,200 forest workers go back to school with tuition assistance. With the allotment of \$30 million additional funding to the B.C. Rural Secretariat for community adjustment and job creation, we can expand the program to assist even more workers and in more industries than the forest industry.

We're hoping that the trusts that we have created and in which we've invested hundreds of millions of dollars will pitch in and partner with us with matching money. Also, we're in discussions with the federal government on doing the same, in the hopes that we'll have \$90 million to assist displaced resource workers. Doing that we create constructive changes on the ground in the communities that need it the most.

I have a quote here from Cheslatta First Nation Chief Corrina Leween, who says: "The job opportunities program has been a godsend for our community. Not only have we been able to employ our people during these tough economic times, we also have taken the first steps to restore our significant historical trade system, which will help diversify our community infrastructure and create new economic opportunities."

We're partnering with first nations. We're partnering with people across this great province and helping workers have money to feed their families during these tough economic times and stay in their communities where they will surely be needed when the economy picks up again, as it is going to.

[1550]

We're supporting families. We're providing stability in their time of need. Another program assisting workers announced by the Ministry of Community Development this year is the labour market agreement with the United Steelworkers. The program covers the region of the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition from Prince George to Smithers.

The \$2 million agreement provides assistance to hundreds of workers in 11 northern communities to upgrade their skills and to obtain sustainable employment. It's a partnership that allows the United Steelworkers to use their expertise working with industry to determine what skills will be needed in the future and targeting those with fewer skills who are facing challenges because of the economy and those who are not eligible for federal employment assistance. It's a unique program that embraces collaboration, focuses on partnerships rather than partisanship and puts the best interests of workers first.

The infrastructure programs that our Premier launched over past years are also stepping up to the plate in a major way to employ displaced resource workers in these troubled times. I'm delighted to see the commitment of \$14 billion in new and ongoing public capital construction in the 2009-2010 budget. This represents 88,000 jobs across this province over the next three years at a time when every job counts. These jobs will be critical to ensure our skilled labour force remains active and in place while the economy recovers.

In the Ministry of Community Development we have identified \$1.4 billion in infrastructure projects that are being built in partnership with local governments and the government of Canada. Again, because we work to build relationships rather than create enemies, we have a federal government that is working overtime to make sure that it helps us deliver benefits to British Columbians in their hour of need. Their budget, recently released, was a tremendous encouragement to us, and we are working hard and fast with them to deliver benefits to British Columbians on the ground.

This construction builds on the work we've already done to assist local governments to build and maintain critical infrastructure. Through programs like Towns for Tomorrow we've partnered with British Columbia's smallest communities.

Our Premier is a leader who is very much in touch with and understands clearly the needs and aspirations of communities, including small communities. So he created a program unique in our history, recognizing that many of these small communities can't afford full partnering with the two senior levels of government. That program pays 80 percent of the cost of projects to communities under 5,000 population, 75 percent to communities under 15,000 in population.

Port Hardy, for example, received \$400,000 to upgrade the seine float and surrounding area to support recreation, and \$400,000 went to the village of Queen Charlotte to build infrastructure for a new green energy supply. By providing 80 percent of funding up to \$400,000 for these communities with populations under 5,000 and 75 percent of funding up to \$375,000 for communities between 5,000 and 15,000 population, this newly approved \$71 million program is providing unprecedented levels of support for British Columbia's small rural communities.

Because it's so well organized and working so well, the federal government is seriously considering partnering with us to enable us to expand that program in these tough times. Between the senior governments and the local communities we're working to preserve the lifestyle that British Columbians know and love, creating construction jobs at a time when the work is sorely needed.

Further to this, through programs like the \$40 million LocalMotion, we've assisted communities to build new green bike paths and walkways that improve the quality of life and encourage healthy living in the populations, projects like \$50,000 in Campbell River for new sidewalks near Sandowne Elementary School and \$180,000 in Pitt Meadows for a cycling bridge over the Katzie Slough.

We're also pleased to be building on our partnerships with the federal government, assisting communities to build infrastructure, create jobs and maintain their quality of life through the Building Canada communities component, where we have funding of \$111 million to assist communities with populations under 100,000 to build infrastructure like new water systems and new sewage infrastructure. The benefits of programs like these are immediate and on the ground.

Near and dear to my heart is the community of Kamloops, where I live. We very recently announced a combined grant of \$14.2 million from the two senior governments for the city of Kamloops to assist them with upgrades to their wastewater treatment plant, having previously funded a state-of-the-art water treatment facility, which Kamloops is tremendously proud of and where Thompson Rivers University teaches technicians how to operate this state-of-the-art technology.

[1555]

These services provide direct benefits to 85,000 people and also reduce greenhouse gas emissions through methane capture, creating a better environment and an estimated 213 direct and indirect jobs in the wastewater treatment facility alone.

That's what these programs are all about: keeping people employed now while improving quality of life and the environment for the future. Stability today, a bright future tomorrow and hope for the long term.

Besides building and maintaining critical infrastructure at a time when construction jobs are key to our economy, this government is also committed to expanding its financial supports to local governments for their operations, to help them provide the services that make British Columbia's communities great places to live.

This year, I'm proud to say, we are fulfilling our commitment to double small community and regional district grants, increasing our annual commitment by \$7 million for a total of \$55 million this year. This continues our strong record of strong community supports.

During these unsettled times we're providing greater certainty to local governments by temporarily restruc-

turing key transfer payments, including both traffic fine revenues and small community and regional district grants. We're collaborating with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities to restructure those grants to give local governments more certainty by providing a higher portion of funds earlier than would normally be the case. The end result is access to funds to ensure communities can continue to provide important services and participate in accelerated infrastructure spending.

Clearly, this government is continuing its commitment to supporting communities. Since 2001 the provincial government has provided \$1.9 billion in funding to local governments, quite a contrast to the record of the NDP when in government, who cut grants to local governments by almost 75 percent. In 1996 local government grants were \$141 million. Over the next five years the NDP slashed them to \$36 million, almost a 75 percent cut.

The people who sit to the left and the right of the Leader of the Opposition had responsibilities for this ministry's predecessor operations — different names. When the NDP's House Leader was sitting in the minister's chair, \$60 million was cut from small community grants. When the member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant was the minister, \$42 million was cut from local government grants. Well, we've been moving in the opposite direction.

As I said, we provided \$1.9 billion in financial support to local governments in addition to the local government transfers they were already receiving. The Premier has had a sharp eye to the welfare of the residents of small communities and rural areas. In fact, our grants have been \$786 per capita in those regions to rural and resource community residents, compared to \$161 per capita in large urban centres.

This year we add an additional \$2.8 million to the Peace River Fair Share agreement, totalling annual support at \$29.4 million. We've committed \$1 million to the Bulkley-Nechako for grants in lieu of taxes for the Kemano hydroelectric project.

We recognize that quality of life in every community in British Columbia is absolutely the key to attracting and retaining businesses and professionals such as nurses, doctors and teachers. It's a critical component when it comes to building our competitive advantage for today and for the future.

Another aspect of quality of life in British Columbia is our commitment to maintaining our environment. That's why we're so pleased that this year's budget includes a \$4 million annual commitment for the next three years to reimburse local governments for any climate carbon tax in exchange for their commitment to become carbon-neutral.

In addition, we've included \$3 million each year for the next three years for our program called Trees for Tomorrow, a program that will assist communities and local non-profits to plant four million trees in public areas

of cities, towns, villages and regional districts throughout British Columbia. Planting trees in urban areas will help lock away greenhouse gases that would otherwise contribute to climate change. It's a great opportunity for communities to come together to improve air quality and beautify their communities.

[1600]

This year's budget clearly addresses the current financial crisis by providing immediate assistance to British Columbia workers. It stimulates the economy by enhancing the speed at which we undertake construction projects. It provides 88,000 jobs across British Columbia, jobs on projects that will set the stage for our economic growth when the world economic climate becomes more stable. We don't think it will ever return to what we used to think of as normal, and we're ready to deal with that and to embrace the opportunities of the present and the future.

Most importantly, this throne speech provides hope. Our government, before it was government, was preceded by a B.C. Liberal platform that promised hope, opportunity and prosperity. We have delivered that in spades, and we'll be delivering it into the future — hope for families that need assistance during these difficult times, hope for the children of British Columbia's future.

I want to urge the members opposite to get on board, to stop being so negative and destructive. Their fear-mongering about the Olympics flies in the face of the optimism that British Columbians naturally feel at the prospect of hosting this greatest of all activities.

The whole world looks forward to the Olympics. Three billion people will watch the opening ceremonies. Just as people did when they had been here for Expo, they'll come back year after year to see more of British Columbia, which will have been showcased for months around the Olympics by international media that already have their reservations to stay here.

By preaching gloom and doom constantly, the members opposite work against the interests of their own constituents. Surely, they should realize that. I chaired the Small Business Roundtable in my previous assignment, and the great people who make up the round table — a permanent round table that listens to small business all around the province, in regional round-table meetings — grew more and more annoyed at the gloom and doom being spread by NDP MLAs. They know very clearly that optimism builds an economy, and that pessimism damages an economy.

Small business is the greatest job creator in this province. There are some 380,000 small businesses, and they produce over a third of the province's gross domestic product. They are really fed up with the negativity from the official opposition — totally fed up.

They also are alarmed at an opposition that still recklessly and incompetently thinks that it's a good idea for a government to interfere in issues such as minimum

wage. We've had an \$8 minimum wage for years. The average pay in British Columbia is over \$21 per hour.

During the '90s when the small business sector was saddled with the highest minimum wage in Canada, I'm sure that the business people told the NDP side, just as they did the B.C. Liberals in opposition, that this was hampering their ability to reward their best employees, to pay their employees with the highest skills what they deserved and keep them in British Columbia. They were forced to pay the highest wage in Canada to entry-level workers, many of whom had to be taught, their first jobs, how to work — not just how to do the work of the employer but how to work in the first place.

When the NDP talks about increasing minimum wage by 25 percent when they become government... Heaven forbid that that should ever happen again. But when they're talking about that, they're making promises with other people's money and never seem to understand that, nor do their supporters, who give them standing ovations for the prospect.

We know that if they became government, heaven forbid, and made that move, they would eliminate tens of thousands of jobs right across this province for people who presently are delighted to have those jobs and who have received many, many other benefits by the decisions of our government.

People who make less than \$15,000 a year don't pay any provincial income tax at all. We made that change. We've given them new access to pharmaceuticals that they didn't have before. We've eliminated the Medical Services Plan premiums that many of them would have had to pay before we were government. We've helped them with housing allowances.

Right across the board, we've constantly had the interests of low-income people in mind with the changes that we've made and have always protected them as we made the changes that we've made to do with wealthier segments of the population.

[1605]

The reckless incompetence and the patent dishonesty and utter untruthfulness of the NDP opposition have been terribly destructive in this province, and it needs to stop. The interference that the NDP committed in the pulp industry in the 1990s....

Point of Order

N. Simons: Madam Speaker, I'm not sure myself, but I would like clarification if "utter untruthfulness" is appropriate language in this House.

Deputy Speaker: Member, I would ask you to withdraw that remark. It is unparliamentary.

Hon. K. Krueger: I'll withdraw it, Madam Speaker.

Debate Continued

Hon. K. Krueger: The interference that the NDP government of the '90s committed in Prince Rupert with the failed Skeena Cellulose pulp mill set up the B.C. pulp industry for the problems that it's experiencing today. They were warned of that by Prof. Emeritus Les Reed of the forestry faculty of the University of British Columbia, who said at the time: "Yes, of course, there's a serious unemployment problem in Prince Rupert, but that is no justification for transferring the problem to other communities in still another reckless experiment in social engineering."

I suggest to the opposition members who continue to speak doom and gloom about the forest industry that they have a hard look at my constituency and those surrounding it. We've got a brand-new sawmill built on the shores of Adams Lake, the most modern sawmill in the southern Interior — over a \$100 million investment ready to go, ready to harvest the mountain pine beetle kill when the market picks up.

We had an announcement by Domtar, the pulp mill in Kamloops, just yesterday: a massive infrastructure investment, a capital investment — \$8 million immediately; \$20 million to follow — to modernize their recovery boilers. That mill has demonstrated leadership. The workers in it, the union, the management, the owner, the city of Kamloops, the government of British Columbia — we've all worked together, and that mill is a going concern.

With this last piece of its revitalization done, with the new co-gen — the expansion of the existing co-gen that flows from the last requests for proposals from B.C. Hydro — that mill will be in a position to employ people who live in the Thompson valleys for generations into the future, to support the 24 sawmills that rely on the pulp mill to take hog fuel, take chips and keep those sawmills viable.

That's the sort of collaboration that's needed in every community in this province and with every resource industry. When I was an opposition member in the 1990s, Highland Valley copper almost closed. It was in the moth-balling process. But people stepped up to the plate. The union took a rollback in its package. B.C. Hydro took a rollback in its rates.

These are things that I was championing as an opposition member, and it worked. We had copper barely over 60 cents at the time, but it rebounded, as commodities do in their cycles. In 2006 not only had all the workers made up the losses that they volunteered for, but that one mine made a billion dollars profit; in 2007, \$750 million profit.

The mining industry is an industry that, every time the NDP becomes government, suffers terribly, gets bombed almost out of existence. There was more investment in mining exploration in the Thompson valleys region in the past year than there was in the whole province in the

last year of the NDP government of the 1990s. But that is an industry that pays family-supporting wages, very large wages, to thousands of people and, again, with a B.C. Liberal government, has a very bright future.

So I urge the members opposite to stop the negativity, get on board, support the Olympics and be proud of the Vancouver Convention Centre, of which I am very proud. I think they will be in their hearts when they tour it as well. It's a beautiful facility. It'll be creating jobs for 50 years, causing the cruise ship industry, the convention industry, the tourism industry, all kinds of aspects of our service economy, to thrive long into the future.

[1610]

Clearly, I completely support this budget. I'm tremendously proud to serve with the Premier of British Columbia and this caucus and this cabinet, and I do urge the opposition to try and let a little sunshine in. Start acting like people that care about British Columbia, their constituents, and help us build a bright and beautiful future in the best place on earth.

H. Bains: It is my pleasure, actually, to stand here and speak on Budget 2009. It will provide me with an opportunity to put my record for the last four years, and it will give me an opportunity to look at what the government has and hasn't done in the last four years.

I want to say, first of all, thanks to my constituents, who put their faith in me and elected me in 2005, sent me to this House and asked me to raise their concerns in this House, deal with the issues that they have, to make those communities better.

It wasn't only my job to bring those concerns here and raise them with the appropriate authorities in the government, but it is to force some action on those issues, to make sure that we were able to deal with those issues that they have. I want to talk about that today.

I want to thank many people who, actually, helped me come to this House, who watched me for the last four years to deliver their message and to see if I was able to deal with the issues that they brought to me and to my office.

I want to thank the labour movement, the B.C. Federation of Labour, for them to continue to work not only to improve the working conditions of their members but to make lives better for the workers in this province who happen to be non-union.

I want to thank them for raising the issues of the farmworkers. They took that issue and brought it to the forefront and brought awareness in this province of the plight of the farmworkers, who were basically ignored by the very government that they elected to protect them — protect them during travel and transportation, protect them when they were at work, protect them about whether they were getting paid according to the laws of the land and protect them from abuse from their employers.

They were instrumental in pushing the changes that were finally brought by this House after a terrible, tragic accident on Highway 1 that took the lives of three workers.

In particular, I want to thank them, also, for pushing the issues and the safety of workers working alone at gas stations. They were instrumental in pushing to make the relevant changes in what came to be known as the De Patie act and having that passed. So I want to thank them.

I want to thank the Steelworkers, right from the beginning of my early working days to my elected position in my local union, and who helped me be elected to this position.

They stood with me through thick and thin and provided me all the support that they could give me — right from Leo Gerard, the international president of the Steelworkers, to Ken Neumann, the national director; Steve Hunt, district 3 director; and many local officers; my own local, Darrell Wong, president of 2171; and Brian Harder and Manjit Sidhu of the local where I actually reside.

[1615]

I want to thank them all. They've been great to me. I think they are great people, a great organization. I think it's organizations such as those.... We have a beautiful province and beautiful country where we have a living standard much, much better than the rest of the world. It is because of the strength of the labour movement, so I want to thank them all for playing their part.

It was a proud moment in November last year during the civic elections when two of my executives got elected to the school board in Surrey — Laurie Larsen, president of CUPE Local 402, and Ijaz Chatta, who has been a community activist. Both of them got elected for the first time. In fact, Ijaz.... It was his first time that he ran, and Laurie lost her election last time by a very small, narrow margin. Both of them are going to do a tremendous.... They are, actually, a tremendous asset to the Surrey school board and to the children of our Surrey district, and they will do a fine job.

Part of the reason they are elected, I think.... There's an organization called the Pakistani Canadian Cultural Association. They were actually very, very instrumental in bringing the support out trying to get Ijaz Chatta elected. I want to thank Naveed Waraich. He's the president of the PCCA. It's doing a fine job as an organization to bring communities together to help make Surrey a better place to live and to continue to put progressive ideas forward so that we can have a very good community to live in. I want to thank them all.

I want to thank a number of organizations in my constituency — the Newton Advocacy Group Society and Susan Keeping and many others who are helping so many people in Surrey. As a result, we are a better society. I want to thank them. I want to thank PICS, which has always been working out there in the community, helping the new immigrants and everyone else out there. I want to thank them as well — Charan Gill and the rest of them.

This will be my opportunity to speak about the budget, which happens to be the last budget before the next election. After carefully examining the contents of this budget by this Liberal government, I'm in a position to give my report card on my promises that I made with my constituents and how effective I was in the last four years.

I'm happy to report that I was able to keep and deliver on my first part of the promise. That was to listen to my constituents and then to raise those issues with appropriate authorities and with the ministries and raise them in this House. Our office was able to help my constituents.

Many of the issues that were brought to us, issues ranging from injured workers' complaints about unfair treatment by WorkSafe B.C., constituents' issues dealing with ICBC, raw log exports and loss of jobs while our own sawmills are being shut down due to the lack of fibre, of the income assistance issues that many constituents bring to our office.... They are having problems in dealing with those issues and getting the cheques.

Homelessness in our community, which has, unfortunately, grown threefold in our community in the last four years.... We were able to bring awareness in our community, raise those issues, try to find some solutions to deal with the homelessness issue in our area.

Issues such as long wait times at Surrey Memorial Hospital emergency department and denying treatment by the Fraser Health to one of my constituents named Tim Morley. Tim Morley was denied treatment on many occasions. Then he was sent off to another authority because he's suing the ministry. He's suing Fraser Health, and as a result of that, he was denied treatment.

I think that was appalling to treat a sick person just because they wanted to exercise their constitutional right to have their say in court and to see whether some injustice was done to them. So we were able to raise those issues.

[1620]

That issue is still going on. Tim Morley is on a hunger strike. Last I checked, it was over 55 days. It is a very grave situation. We raised it with the minister, but with the same answer: "We cannot deal with it, because he's suing the ministry."

We have issues about manufactured home owners worrying about having being made homeless by the developers who see quick dollars by developing those lands that their homes are located on, where they've lived for decades. Those are the communities that they know. Those are the communities that they developed. Those are the communities that they actually make workable for themselves. They are actually beautiful communities if you go and visit them.

They look out for each other. But they had issues, because they aren't sure if tomorrow someone will come in with loads of money and want to develop their land. There's hardly any protection left because of the changes brought by this government.

We pushed those issues here in the House. Many of my colleagues brought those issues to this House. We stood with them, and we will continue to stay with them, because those are the people, many of them seniors, that built this country and built this province. As a result, we are proudly able to go around the world to say that we have the best country to live in. It's because of those seniors. It's because of those people who are, some of them, living in the manufactured homes. We were able to bring those issues here, and those issues still need to be dealt with.

We had issues such as the elderly, seniors, being overcharged with their medical premiums. I'm glad to say here that because of my staff looking into this, this elderly woman was able to get a \$3,000 refund. She's on a fixed income. She had no idea how to go about it. She wasn't even sure that she was paying more than what she should have been. It was our staff that was able to deal with that issue, and she was able to get \$3,000 back.

Many of my neighbours that I met and dealt with were worried about crime in their neighbourhood. As I was meeting with community after community, having my mobile office move into different parts of the community, one theme continued on in my neighbourhood meetings.

The crime in the neighbourhoods, the crime in the parks that are nearby, is unbearable. Youth are drinking, are vandalizing their property, leaving broken glass behind, making noises where their kids have to go to school, and the family had to go to work in the morning, and they couldn't sleep. This happened not only on the weekends but right through the week.

We were able to bring the police and the parks board officials, trying to meet with those neighbours and trying to deal with those issues. But again, the issues remain. Police will tell you in private that they don't have the resources that they need to deal with every call that they get. That is the problem there.

We also had issues of new immigrants being ripped off because they trusted this government and then enrolled in the private colleges that were started by this minister and this government. They neither got their education.... They ended up getting bills from the collection agencies because the tuition fees went, on their behalf, to the college directly. Colleges went bankrupt afterwards, and now these poor students are asked to pay back the student loans that they were actually awarded. They never saw a penny of that — it went to the college — and didn't get the education. So those were the issues.

The issue of asking the government and the local authorities to control the substance called doda, which is being sold in Surrey and the Lower Mainland — undetected, unprotected and unregulated. This is an opium-derivative substance that is being sold. No one knows what's in them, and we raised that issue by writing a letter to the Solicitor General and bringing it to the attention of the local police.

Asking the government for the last couple of years to deal with the payday loan issue.... Poor folks who have no way of going around and getting their paycheques cashed are having to depend on these shops that are set up — totally unregulated, charging whatever they want to charge. We were able to raise that issue with the government and the authorities as well. Or generally, people who are fed up with this government's neglect and arrogance and being too one-sided....

I will speak to each of these issues I talked about little bit later. Let me report to the second part of my promise that I made with my constituents, having to resolve those issues to the satisfaction of my constituents.

I want to take this opportunity to thank my staff for going out of their way to help those who contacted us — Emily Zimmerman, Simrath Chabra, Janice Macdonald and Raj Patara. They have been outstanding community workers, helping the people who came there for support.

We were not able to resolve many individual cases, but there was great deal of frustration by many constituents and by my staff to deal with WorkSafe B.C. cases or with a case involving unfair government policies. I'm disappointed to report that these big issues that are brought to the attention of this government remain to be addressed.

I'll go over one by one some of those issues that we were able to deal with and not resolve. I'll start with Surrey Memorial Hospital and lack of health care services that my constituents and, overall, Surrey people face.

Surrey Memorial Hospital expansion project has been all about this government's photo ops and very little action, causing chaos and unending delays. Many residents have complained about wait times and delayed treatment. Almost all have commended the staff for their effort and realize the lack of service is a result of lack of funding and resources for that staff.

In 2005 the minister, with great fanfare, went to Surrey and made an announcement that they would be fast-tracking the study, then they'd fast-track the construction of the expansion of the emergency ward and build a state-of-the-art ambulatory unit. All of that was due to a great deal of pressure by the constituents and by the opposition members of this House.

However, promises were not kept. We have had another delay now announced to the Surrey Memorial emergency ward expansion. The latest the minister has announced is that the Surrey Memorial Hospital emergency expansion, along with the additions to the hospital, now will not be completed until 2014. That will be three elections by this government — three elections.

Nothing has been done to the emergency ward, and people continue to suffer in the emergency ward for hours. Anyone out in Surrey knows that, and it's a general understanding by the Surrey residents out there that if you're hurt, if you're sick, don't go to Surrey Memorial Hospital emergency, because they know they don't have

the resources. They will end up lining up in the hallway for days and not getting the treatment or seeing a doctor for hours.

I think that's the problem. This government continues to neglect the needs of Surrey when it comes to the health care services.

Crime in our neighbourhood is escalating. I have had neighbourhood meetings, like I said before, in all areas of Surrey-Newton. The main complaint from residents is crime in the parks around their homes, mostly from young adults selling drugs, drinking and listening to loud music. Police are called but do not have the resources to attend.

Businesses in Newton have been complaining about property theft and vandalism. Recently there has been an escalation of gang violence in the Lower Mainland and in Surrey in particular. The number of gangs is growing — from ten gangs ten years ago to 129 now. No wonder we have recently seen the largest influx of gang violence. We have experienced dozens of shootings in a period of days.

If I didn't know any better, this sounds like a trailer for the next action drama movie filmed right here in the Lower Mainland, but the sad reality is that it's true. The reality is plain and simple. This government has no plan to address this issue. There was no plan before. There is none in the throne speech, nor are there any resources allocated in this budget.

[1630]

Instead, the reality is that the government is cutting funding to the prosecutors and court services. As a result, the gang members are laughing all the way to the site of the next crime.

This government has denied community court funding for Surrey. Let's make this clear, folks. Let's make this clear. This is the same government that denied funding for the community court in Surrey, cut funding to the prosecutor office, closed ten jails in the last eight years. With all the gun violence in our streets, they want us to believe that with the cut to the funding to the Attorney General's office, cut to the Solicitor General's office, everything will be fine, just because they promised it.

We had chances. We had a chance to listen to the government's throne speech and look at the budget and could find nowhere that government even tried to address the public safety or gang violence in our neighbourhoods — nothing.

This government is out of touch with what is going on in the neighbourhoods. They don't even think that a four-year-old child in the back seat of a gun-riddled vehicle is a cause for action. Our children and our livelihood are being threatened. The Premier needs to wake up.

What will it take for this government to realize what's going on in B.C.? We have a gang war going on, on our streets right now, and this government is putting a blind eye to it.

Well, if this government is so arrogant that they don't want to hear what's happening in opposition members' ridings, maybe they can talk to the Fort Langley–Aldergrove member. If I recall, this member was also a former member of the RCMP and a security specialist, and served his community well, I'm told. It was his community that has seen two shootings in the last little while.

Where are you, Members? Why is it that you're not making noise to your Premier and demanding action immediately? If the Premier doesn't want to listen to his own cabinet minister, how about Minister of Public Safety Peter Van Loan? Minister of Public Safety Peter Van Loan declared that British Columbia has become the gang capital of Canada.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Well, why is it that every British Columbian is asking this Premier for action, and yet there's still no plan for action, just more promises or just "trust us"? We don't need empty promises. We need action, and we need it now.

I move on to the other area. We have a gridlock after gridlock of traffic in Surrey. Instead of dealing with the public issue of providing them efficient, affordable public transit, what this government does is force them to accept a gas tax, a gas tax on people who can least afford it — taxi drivers, small businesses, the working people. Those are the people that are getting hit. Yet there's no alternative for them for public transit — no alternative, no incentive for them to get out of their cars.

They have made public transit fares the highest in Canada, on one hand, and on the other hand, forced gas tax onto the working people. I think this government has their priorities completely wrong, and that's how they're hitting the working people.

I have talked about manufactured home owners issues. Doreen Mortensen, president of Surrey Manufactured Home Owners Association, is putting up such a great fight to protect the rights of manufactured home owners, to restore fair compensation to the manufactured home owners that are displaced due to development.

At her age, it is a shame that she should be forced to worry and fight for such a fundamental right — the right to a roof over your head, the right to protect your own home — but she deserves a huge, huge bank of thanks from all of us for continuing to work on behalf of the manufactured home owners. This government has neglected them, and she's putting up a fight. We're going to stand with Doreen Mortensen, and we will fight to protect the manufactured homes and their rights.

We talked about public transportation. Surrey needs buses now. I want to thank Don MacLeod and Jim Houlahan from Canadian Auto Workers Local 111 for their efforts at raising awareness of the needs of Surrey transit users.

The new bridge — I'll talk about that a little later — is a must but will not alleviate traffic for four more years, even if it's built according to the plans of this government or according to the time frame that they are telling us. Surrey is growing by 1,000 people a month. We need efficient transit long before the bridge is finished.

[1635]

Five hundred buses. That's what we need now. That's what the Surrey council has asked for. That's what the mayor has asked for — but now, not 2020. What promise we've got from this government is 20 buses by 2012. That's not good enough. That's not keeping up with the needs of Surrey people — the fastest-growing community in Canada. So that's what we need right now, and this government continues to ignore that.

Let's talk about Port Mann Bridge for a while. They've continued to make announcement after announcement on this bridge. Only nine months ago it was supposed to be a twinning of Port Mann Bridge, with the expenditure of \$1.6 billion.

When you make announcements such as this, an announcement by a government, you would think that they have done their homework, they have talked to the stakeholders, they have talked to the experts, and then they talked to the financial experts to put the budget together. They came up with a plan that what was needed was a twinning of the bridge. We'll keep the old bridge, we'll have another one next to it, and the cost will be \$1.6 billion.

Well, what changed in nine months? All of a sudden, that plan is no good. Now we have to have a new plan with a new budget. What had changed? The old bridge is still there, and they're talking about how it costs too much in maintenance costs. Well, they knew that nine months ago, or they forgot about that at that time, I guess. That's how they are going — flying and making decisions as they go, making an announcement based on: "What do you think is popular today to get us elected?"

But that's not being responsible. That's being too political and playing games with the public and public tax dollars. I'm expecting that nine months down the road they probably will come up with another announcement: "Well, you know, this one mega-bridge that we announced nine months earlier, with a \$3.6 billion cost, isn't going to cut it. We have come up with a new plan. Perhaps we need a double-decker bridge now, because that will serve the community well, with a cost of maybe \$6 billion."

That's how the announcement, the photo ops.... That's all we have seen from this government — no action. That's no different than Surrey Memorial Hospital. Since 2005 we have seen more than a dozen announcements of the same project but very little action. The only thing you see out there right now, eight years being in power right now, is a small hole in the ground. That's all you see on a corner of Fraser Highway and 140th Street. That's all you see. I expect they will be going there again when

they start to fill that hole. You know: "We are building a hospital in here."

Surrey residents deserve better from this government. They needed that hospital four years ago, and we haven't seen any action from them. The Minister of Health said ten years ago.... Had they agreed, had they continued on with the plans that were in place by the previous government, we would have had a hospital nine years ago.

Interjection.

H. Bains: I'm glad the Minister of Health is engaging in this discussion. I'm glad to get engaged in that discussion.

I have asked the minister before: "Come with me. I invite you. Come and sit in the emergency ward for a day. Watch those patients waiting six hours, seven hours, eight hours — no doctor to be seen." I have seen patients in there in the hallways for days — days and days in the hallway.

I was in Merritt the other day. I met with one young woman. Her relative was in Kelowna Hospital. She said every day she saw two beds in the hallway in Kelowna Hospital — every day. So it's hallway medicine under the watch of this government — announcement, photo ops, no action. That has to change.

You know what? People are telling me that they're sick and tired of this government's arrogance, sick and tired of this government being out of touch. They continue to say that everything is fine when it comes to health care. Doctors are wrong. Nurses are wrong. Health care workers are wrong. The only person right is this minister, this government. But let me tell you, the people of Surrey, people of this province don't think so. They think this minister is wrong and this government is wrong.

[1640]

Let me go over to some of the other important issues. I'll move over, and I think the Minister of Health can now take a breath. We will talk about post-secondary education. We want to talk about the foreign credentials. We have a shortage of professionals in this province, a shortage of doctors, a shortage of nurses, and yet we have doctors with degrees. We promised them to come here because we need their skills. As soon as they step on the land here, they're told that their credentials are no good.

My time is up? Can I get an extension, Madam Speaker? I have so many other issues to talk about.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

J. Nuraney: It's very sad when you hear the member opposite talk about the hospital that could have been built in Surrey if we had followed their plan. They had no plan, and every announcement that they made never had any money to follow it.

I tell you, Madam Speaker, the saddest part of British Columbia history took place in the 1990s. People's memories are so short that members today sit there and criticize and point fingers and have a lot of hot air. But I have not seen one solution to a problem that they have suggested to us in the last four years. So it is very sad.

Ever since we have become government, there has been one thing that has been very clear in my mind: that we will not take any action at whim. There will always be a well-thought-out plan to deal with the various aspects of governing.

We have witnessed the dangers of dishonest declaration of government initiatives, cooked-up budgets and misrepresentation by the previous government. It is so naive to think that the public will not see through such misrepresentation and dishonesty. Such dishonesty causes great damage and sometimes irreversible damage to all society.

Point of Order

N. Simons: I'm just wondering if it's appropriate language in this House to refer to dishonesty on a repeated basis without checking his language.

Deputy Speaker: Member, the word "dishonest" should be withdrawn.

J. Nuraney: The word "dishonesty" should be withdrawn. Would "not being honest" be acceptable?

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member.

J. Nuraney: "Not being honest" is acceptable.

Deputy Speaker: Member, dishonest is not being honest, so if you're being asked to withdraw "dishonest," you're being asked....

J. Nuraney: I do withdraw, Madam Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Debate Continued

J. Nuraney: Now, the reference that I was making is well illustrated in this example. That's when the NDP government decided to close the Riverview Hospital and the facility that was there. There were people there with mental illness, and they said at the time that they wanted to encourage these patients to live independently.

They let them all out of the facility, and at that time, they declared that they had \$167 million put aside to help them through that transition and to provide them

with some support. The truth of the matter is that they had neither the money nor the intention to do so.

[1645]

Our homelessness problem today is a direct result of this decision made by the previous NDP government. The burden on our society because of this measure, where there was no support and there was no money to back it up, has been enormous.

The public saw through this and, as a result, lost all confidence in the NDP government and elected a B.C. Liberal government, with an overwhelming majority. Our task then was very clear. We had to regain the confidence of the electorate. The decision was made that whatever we do, we must do it with integrity and stay on course.

Our efforts and good governance paid off. We saw the confidence return, and our economy enjoyed the unprecedented rate of success. The investments in our province are at their highest in the last eight years and the unemployment rate that we had seen, at its lowest. Those who had left our province out of the feeling of despondency returned to take part in the opportunities offered.

We began to experience large surpluses. The challenge — a pleasant one at that, if I may say so — was to invest our dollars in areas which will maximize the benefits to all British Columbians and to ensure that the future of our province will be built on solid foundations.

We invested heavily in our health care and education, advanced education and social services. We created more spaces for our students to help them obtain higher education at our universities and colleges. Our investment in K-to-12 education is the highest ever in the history of British Columbia, at a time when enrolments are declining.

In spite of this, we see the BCTF launch a campaign of misinformation and untruths. When you see such outlandish misrepresentation in advertising, you ask yourself: "Has anything changed in the strong ties between the NDP and the trade unions?" Obviously, not at this....

Interjections.

J. Nuraney: Oh, yeah, free speech in the terms of trade unions' great ties with the NDP is a free-spoken statement. Obviously, this is the very foundation and the purpose of the NDP. It is really explicitly mentioned in *The Regina Manifesto*, which is the birth certificate of the NDP. It clearly uses the statements, like the ability to organize trade unions and eradicate the system of capitalism and replace it with the completely planned economy of socialism.

It is astonishing to notice that this philosophy, which has failed in the countries behind the iron curtain, is being practised by the NDP in this country. I've always maintained that rather than advocating such archaic

philosophy, the unions should enter into meaningful discussions with our government for the benefit of all, rather than adopting a confrontational behaviour. Freedom should not be taken as a licence to disseminate wrong information which could damage the interest of the public at large.

In recent months we've experienced a global decline in the economy. It is time now that people understand the magnitude of this problem and the loss of confidence in the financial markets.

[1650]

This is a phenomenon which is a very difficult one to comprehend, in view of the sophistication that has evolved, weaving a web that the experts in the field find difficult to understand. Indiscriminate trading of financial instruments globally has brought about an immense problem.

In such circumstances, we need people who have an understanding of its implications and expertise in guiding us through this maze. The direct impact our government has had through this crisis is a rapid decline in the revenues, making it very difficult to sustain our ongoing commitments to health care, education and social services. Deficits were looming in the horizon, and this made it incumbent upon us to revisit our legislation on a balanced budget.

After very careful deliberations, we came to the conclusion that it is important that we amend the Balanced Budget and Ministerial Accountability Act to allow us the ability to continue our essential commitments and to enter into a deficit situation. In spite of this dramatic decline in our revenues, our Minister of Finance presented to us a budget, which is very much in keeping with our vision of the province, maintaining funding for important services and bringing measures that are prudent.

It is also important to note that this provision allows us to run deficits for two years only, and then we are required to return to a balanced budget. This will allow us to continue to make health care our priority. A total of \$2.5 billion will be invested in capital spending to reinforce our system by providing much-needed capacity and by building new hospitals and upgrading existing health facilities.

A total of \$1.3 billion will be invested across British Columbia to replace, renovate or expand K-to-12 schools. This is directly in contrast to the very expensive campaign launched by the BCTF, proving that their contention is unfounded and engineered to instil fear in the minds of the public.

A further \$1.7 billion will be invested across British Columbia over three years in post-secondary facilities, including projects to increase student capacity.

And \$2.3 billion is allocated for major transportation and capital infrastructure including improvements to the Pitt River Bridge, South Fraser perimeter road. This is in addition to the major \$3 billion Port Mann bridge replacement already announced.

The previous speaker talked about the Port Mann bridge and its expansion and did not quite understand as to why we are doing this. I believe that perhaps he has not had the opportunity to travel on that road lately when people have to sit in their cars for hours on end to either get to work or to get home. So it is critical that our government addresses that problem so that people can enjoy a better quality of life by being with their families quicker and to get to their work faster than they would normally do.

A further \$166 million will be invested in the expansion of student residences at UBC and the Vancouver Community College Broadway, King Edward campus.

These are strategic investments that will provide us the ability to strive for excellence in the areas of health care, education and other endeavours of this government. These investments will also create several thousand jobs, which is a critical requirement to trigger recovery from our economic crisis.

It is important to note that we have invested, since we have become government, more money in our health care system than ever before. We have also created more spaces for medical and nursing training. More and new modern equipment has been added and procedures made more efficient, resulting in reductions in wait times for surgeries and emergency treatments.

[1655]

Our health authorities are working very hard, and they've shown results by improving the delivery of health care. Burnaby Hospital in my riding has seen the benefits of these new investments. We have added a new psychiatric ward, improvement in the cancer clinic, additions to the palliative and acute care beds and a recent renovation to our emergency area.

We are continuing to invest in the future of our province with increased funding for students. In the K-to-12 education system, we are now funding \$8,242 per student. This is the highest ever in the history of our province.

Another fact, in contrast to the claim by the BCTF, who claims that we are cutting funding — Budget 2009 provides \$110 million over three years to support vulnerable children and families. This is a very critical investment for our immigrant families whose children find it very difficult and challenging to assimilate in our education system.

Our government is very conscious of the challenges of our newly immigrant families and the problems that they face when their children enter our education system with either no experience or perhaps with a situation where they have never, ever been to a school. With this in mind, we've brought new investments to our school system whereby school districts were able to hire more staff to deal with such students on a one-to-one level. Schools in Burnaby, like Byrne Creek School, have been a beneficiary of this investment, and I can tell you that we are now much better off in Burnaby in dealing with this problem.

The province is also providing an additional \$110 million over three years to meet the increased income assistance needs of vulnerable British Columbians during this economic downturn. To end the cycle of poverty and homelessness, the province is investing an additional \$34 million to outreach teams and interim assistance. This initiative of this government has been very successful and has managed to connect with hundreds of homeless people and arrange housing and other support services.

I've had the opportunity to work in this field with these volunteers and the social service people who do this great service to our people, and I have seen the positive change that this investment has made in the lives of people who are homeless.

This budget provides not only the continuity of our efforts in the past years to improve the level of services provided, but it's targeted to creating jobs, which will be the ultimate solution to combat this economic downturn.

Our government has also introduced other measures for the benefit of our taxpayers. A temporary property tax deferral program, introduced for the 2009-2010 taxation years, to allow homeowners experiencing financial hardships due to current economic conditions and who have at least 15 percent equity in their homes.... They will now be able to defer their property taxes.

We are extending the provincial sales tax exemption for energy efficient homes and commercial vehicles. The exemptions for the Energy Star-qualified oil-fired furnaces, boilers and air- and ground-source heat pumps purchased or leased for residential use now is extended to March 31, 2011.

Effective February 18, 2009, auxiliary power units, cab heaters and engine heaters for trucks — these will be exempted until March 31, 2012. Use of these devices reduces fuel use and emissions, as they reduce the need for trucks from idling.

[1700]

We will increase the low-income climate action credit by 10 percent, effective July 1, 2011. This new benefit will put an additional \$15 million a year back in the pockets of the families and individuals who need it the most. This is part of our comprehensive strategy to fight global warming. These benefits are in addition to the various other benefits, like the over 100 tax reductions that this government has put in place.

There is no doubt that we are facing an unprecedented challenge in the coming years as the world finds out how to best get out of this financial mess that some of our leading financial institutions in the United States have gotten us into. We have always prided ourselves as leaders in what we do, and this time we are once again taking the lead in making and taking cautious and prudent steps to mitigate the negative impact that might happen to our province as a result of this global economic downturn.

Madam Speaker, I am a very proud member of this government, a government that has been very thoughtful, a government that has been very caring, a government that is visionary. It is a government that says to us all: "We will work, we will take bold actions, and we have the courage of our convictions." This is all for the good of all British Columbians.

I can say with great pride that I shall be supporting this budget and look forward to the further initiatives that this government may take to secure the future, not only of ourselves but of our children.

N. Simons: It's my pleasure to offer my comments on Budget 2009. I don't think that you'll find a lot of similarity with the previous speaker's words. However, another angle is always helpful for those in the gallery who want to hear a rounded discussion about this particular bill, and it's my pleasure to be able to offer that to the House this afternoon.

Let me start by saying it continues to be a privilege to represent the people of the Powell River-Sunshine Coast constituency. I have a very good working relationship with all of the elected officials who work there and serve their communities. I am pleased to say that that relationship is being enhanced every day. We've got a lot of work to do to make sure that our community members are not negatively impacted, not just by the economic downturn but also by this government's priorities, which often don't include them.

I'd like to particularly speak about the work that is done in the constituency by my constituency assistants, Maggie Hathaway and Kim Tournat. I think they do a marvellous job offering advocacy in these difficult times as well as in the times when the economy was in slightly better condition. The work that they do to advocate on behalf of citizens — as they say, on the ground floor — I think is a very important role in this province.

Here in this House my responsibility is to make sure that government is held to account for the actions they take and that we point out areas where they may be failing the people of British Columbia. We try to nudge them in the direction which we believe would be more appropriate to provide the service necessary to British Columbians.

With that being said, I would like to point out that I believe that Budget 2009 not only doesn't meet the needs of the people of British Columbia, but in fact it's simply a pre-election budget that may have very, very little resemblance to what would happen if, as the member opposite says, God forbid, this government is re-elected.

I believe that it's important to start by saying the one thing that I will give credit to this government for is — and it's not often that I like to give credit, but in this particular case they certainly deserve it — that it's the government of amazing slogans.

[1705]

I know maybe some of them were expecting me to actually say something nice. But you know, slogans are nice. Slogans are exciting. If, in fact, the words of my colleagues opposite are true, optimism is reflected in words, and if words are optimism, then words are all that matters.

In fact, it's a golden day here, and it's a day where we've got a wonderful opportunity to talk about the future of the province. I won't be negative, and I won't be pessimistic. I'll be relying on the strength of British Columbians to get ourselves through this difficult economic time, as opposed to the strength or lack thereof of this particular government. You know, it's not for lack of trying, because we do see some effort, and oftentimes one gets marks for effort.

But we are in a time of economic turmoil. We are certainly not used to being in this particular situation. I think that now things are bad, government blames the worldwide economic situation. Of course, we all agree. I think we need to understand that the economic downturn in the forest industry was happening since at least early 2007, and in 2008 they were still denying the existence of a problem in the sector.

We see example after example of a government that attempts to pave over the potholes that exist in their policies...

H. Lali: Smudge.

N. Simons: ...smudge over the potholes that exist in their economy. I don't think that quite works. My honourable friend behind me, I'm not sure if he's offering helpful words or not.

I'd like to speak about issues that relate specifically to the area of my opposition critic portfolio, which is that of Children and Families. I think that when we talk about the economy in this House and we talk about the importance of a strong economy, what we're really talking about is how we are looking after the children and how we are looking after the vulnerable people in this province.

I think a measure of a government's success should be related to their ability to ensure that children in this province are safe, are nurtured, grow up in a healthy living environment and are offered all the opportunities that we would want our children to have in this province.

As the critic for the Ministry of Children and Family Development I have to say that the record of this government is woeful. I think that most independent observers who watch this government's action on that file would agree that a word similar to woeful would apply.

Positive changes occur at glacial pace. Secrecy is a hallmark of the government, especially the Ministry of Children and Families. Changing directions midstream seems to occur on a regular basis. Priorities seem to be undefined from one month to the next. These are all factors that influence the ability of social workers around

this province to conduct their work in a way where they feel supported. I think, ultimately, that is where I find this budget so lacking.

We've known since 2001, when this government tried to impose a 23 percent budget cut on the Ministry of Children and Families, the impact that that had on children. Now, we all know that we have examples that were reported in the newspapers on a daily basis that symbolized that inappropriate cut. We saw an attempt to address that issue by reducing the cut from 23 percent to 11 percent. We saw an attempt at a budget for children that continued to leave children behind in this province. And we're not talking about children in isolation. We're talking about those families in which those children are nurtured.

We also recognize the fact that in this province of plenty, it's difficult to be positive and feel good about the fact that we are the leaders in this country on child poverty. Now, I don't mean to sound depressing, and I don't mean to sound pessimistic, but the fact of this government's impact on children and their families is that we lead the country in child poverty once again.

I'm sorry if that causes reactions of discomfort among this government, but who else is responsible for this shame? Who else is responsible for the budgets that successively ignore children and families in this province?

[1710]

Don't point to us to say we're using the wrong words. Don't point to us to say we're making you feel bad. Our responsibility is to ensure that this government takes care of those who are not capable of looking after themselves and their problems.

Don't tell me I'm pessimistic when I'm pointing out that this government has ignored the 20,000-plus jobs that have been lost in the forest sector in this province since 2007. I ask this government not to call me depressing when I say that it was this government that cut practically every regulation in our environment, that allows the denuding of our natural resources. Don't blame me if that sounds bad to you, because that's your government's policies.

This is not a question of whether you like what we say or not. Our responsibility in this House as legislators is to ensure that government is held to account. That's why the people of this province said: "Make sure you hold government to account on the issues of health care."

I'm not supposed to sound too thrilled at the fact that when I walk through hospitals, the hallways are cluttered with beds, with patients lying in those beds. I was in the hospital very recently to look after a young child — a young child whose story, by the way, could exemplify the failures of this government when it comes to children and families.

But this is not me sounding depressing. This is me reflecting the reality that exists in our communities across this province, and this government has failed each and every one of them.

I take a bit of umbrage at the fact that government wants to characterize our comments as negative. I think it's important for us to point out reality. Some people say, "Pessimistic," and I say: "We need to say that these are the facts as they exist in our community." You can throw names back. You can call me any name you want. This government, if that's the level to which they would like to lower themselves — that's fine with me. It reflects on them. It doesn't reflect on me.

I think we need to say clearly to the people of British Columbia that this budget is not going to help them. This budget is essentially a two-month pre-election budget designed in some strange way to appeal to the people of British Columbia.

There have been cuts after cuts to the Ministry of Children and Families, and I've pointed this out to the Minister of Children and Families. A 0.99 percent increase, a so-called increase, over three years, which is 0.33 percent per year, is not going to cover the 3.5 percent increase in wages that will occur through that same period of time.

Now, I'm not an economist, so perhaps I'm misunderstanding something here, but I'll tell you what the net impact of that so-called increase is going to have. We're going to have an increase of negative 200 social workers in this province. These are social workers that on a daily basis go and visit homes across this province after receiving reports of abuse or neglect, and they try to determine the truth of the situation.

Let's just say that their job is not easy in the best of times. Their job is not one that many people really would want to do, especially when they know that their employer is not a very supportive employer. They are forced on a daily basis to respond to families in crisis without the necessary tools to address those issues.

We saw a leaked report very recently. A leaked report came to the attention of the opposition, it came to the attention of government, and it came to the attention of the media. What did that report tell us? That report told us that the cuts that occurred in 2002 and 2003 are coming home to roost now in higher costs. That is just bad planning. That is bad management, a characteristic of this government that comes across clearly when you see the impacts that their cuts have had, not just in the immediacy of the time when they were made but in the long term.

Now, those cuts to foster homes in particular have resulted in an increase in the cost of looking after children who are unable, on a temporary basis, to live at home. We're talking about children who are vulnerable, children who may have been emotionally neglected or abused sexually or physically.

[1715]

I would say that most people would probably agree with me that that's not exactly the place where you want to make cuts without really contemplating the

impact. But nobody contemplated the impact, because they didn't recognize, perhaps, that the cost of abandoning preventative programs is going to result in a cost incurred later on.

In the area of child and family services, simply in the area of Ministry of Children and Family services, we've seen waste. We've seen hundreds of thousands of dollars going into refurbished boardrooms with beautiful mosaics and all the rest. It's not very often used, as I understand it.

We've seen \$26 million — the number that this government admitted to spending — on a process of regionalization that was very badly planned, did not involve the first nations input until the final hour and was ultimately abandoned. So when we look at this government's ability to plan for the future and to manage their budget of the time, we know that they've failed in the past, and we have little doubt that their ability to plan for the future is equally questionable.

There are a lot of issues that I find troublesome with this government's policies. Obviously, I think that they're misguided in many ways. However, I don't think any more so than in the area of the energy policy, which is really resulting in a loss of potential revenue to the province at the expense of the province.

I think we need to look at that issue. We need to look at independent power. We need to look at the fact that... Why would our Crown corporation, which would generate power for us and generate revenue for the province in order to pay for services, be transferred to big multi-nationals? Why would that be given away?

Why would our rivers and our streams be up for auction to the private sector in order to supply, perhaps, the United States market? This should be revenue that comes to British Columbians. These should be revenue sources that remain intact for British Columbians. I think that many people I speak to believe that it's a giveaway, that it's an abandonment of the ownership of our resources.

With that abandonment go our environmental regulations. With that abandonment go our sources of potential revenue that would be able to provide for British Columbia in a way that we don't have to continue to be leading the country in child poverty, that we won't have to continue to be a laughingstock in Canada with respect to its success in dealing with those living in poverty.

The minimum wage. Again, they talk about providing tax relief to this sector or to that sector as if it's going to magically create an economic boom. We see corporate tax cuts, but we see corporations laying off workers right and left, and we don't know if the benefit is necessarily that which we have expected.

The concerns I have, Madam Speaker, have to do with regular folks — people who live in our communities, who struggle to get by, who work hard and who are paying much more now than they did five years ago in every imaginable service fee, from Medical Services

Plan to licensing to all sorts of other costs they have had to incur because of this government's priorities. It's those priorities that I find most problematic. But they are also developed, I think, without appropriate consultation with the people of British Columbia.

Back in October, when this government finally realized that things weren't going quite as well as planned, as they had hoped — their fingers were crossed, but it wasn't having the impact that they wanted — we saw the government introduce a ten-point plan so that they could talk about being a deficit-free zone, and all sorts of cute little language like that.

A deficit-free zone. In October they were planning for that, and one of those plans had to do with paying for a fare reduction for B.C. Ferries, a two-month fare reduction for B.C. Ferries. Residents in my community, I would like to point out, are the only.... It's the only constituency in the province where you have to take a ferry to get there, wherever you are in my constituency. It's islands and coastal communities that are inaccessible by road. Now, those ferry fares are the lifeline to the businesses, to the tourists and to the residents alike.

Those ferry lineups and those ferry parking lots and terminals are well known to the residents of Powell River–Sunshine Coast, and they are an essential part of daily life in the communities that I represent.

[1720]

Since the transportation system that we all relied on was privatized, we have seen three things happen. We have seen an increase in cost, we have seen a reduction of staff, and we have seen a bloating of the senior management. I think all of those things have caused a lot of cynicism in my community. They've caused a lot of hardship as well, and that hardship is real.

In the economic plan announced in October, the government proudly stated that they were going to reduce fares for two months, in order to encourage people to go visit their families. I think that's nice. That was a nice gesture, and it's difficult for me to.... But I think it would have been appropriate had the government spoken to anybody, and it could have been the first person they met on the street, that perhaps to reduce the ferry fares right in the most important time of retail sales might actually have some negative impact on businesses in communities.

I don't mind the encouragement for people to visit family, but as you do....

Hon. K. Krueger: You're digging deep for that negative.

N. Simons: No, this is actually an issue that's been brought up by chambers of commerce. This has been brought up by service groups. They say: "If you're going to reduce the ferry fares in our communities, don't do it when it will encourage people to shop off-coast."

Because of the nature and the geography of our communities, we don't have the option of just going into

Vancouver any time of day or onto the north Island any time of day. We have restrictions so that when we make trips to places, we go shopping there, etc.

I would say to this government that it would be better if they had consulted with the people of British Columbia, with the people of the Sunshine Coast, with the people of Powell River. They would have probably recommended that had there been a two-month reduction in ferry fares as a stimulus package, to do so perhaps in January–February.

This is not exactly something that is going to, in itself, turn around anyone's economy. What might have an impact is if the government did invest in areas that might benefit my constituency or the constituencies of rural British Columbia, but we haven't seen that. We haven't seen anything at all like that. We've seen, in fact, a bit of a decline in the expectations of British Columbians who live in rural communities.

Just for an example, tourism is important to my constituency because it's a beautiful place. They've got kayaking and skiing. They've got mountain bicycling, and they've got scuba diving. We've got arts. We've got the Kathaumixw choral festival in Powell River. We've got the Festival of the Written Arts in Sechelt. We have the Fibre Arts Festival in Gibsons. There are beautiful festivals, beautiful attractions that bring people from all across western Canada and the United States to see the beauty of Powell River–Sunshine Coast, and I encourage them to visit.

Inland Lake. There is something that I might give the government some credit for. [Applause.] I don't do that simply to give the government members an opportunity to clap for themselves, but that's fine if they want to do that.

I think that the community expressed their needs very eloquently to government in order to receive assistance with that particular project. It's an accessible trail around a lake in what is wilderness area, accessible to people with disabilities, and I think it's going to be quite an attraction to people from wherever they live. I think those are some of the projects that actually make Powell River–Sunshine Coast an attractive place for people to visit.

The Premier has cut Tourism by 46 percent over the next three years, and it's an important issue. It's an important area where maybe we should be promoting instead of actually cutting. That's just one area that I think would be an appropriate priority for this government, especially considering the fact that they trumpet themselves as the great supporters of the tourism industry.

You know what? The best tourism industry in this province is the natural beauty of the province, whether you want to call it the best place on earth or not. I think that's slightly demeaning to everybody else, but I think it is a most beautiful place. I think if everyone has an opportunity to see British Columbia, they should do

so — especially Powell River–Sunshine Coast, which is a jewel in this province.

[1725]

I think what we should be contemplating is the fact that we've come through a time of economic successes with commodity prices being high. We've seen the impact when they go down. We've come through a period where we've had surpluses. I fear, with the knowledge that we're entering a difficult time and a lot of the surplus has just been squandered, that we still have not addressed the issue of homelessness in this province.

I know people who are homeless. I know people who are close to homelessness. I think that when you actually know who these people are, when you talk to them, you know there's a good reason why we should actually be paying much more attention to those folks who are without a home or who are in precarious situations. We're dealing, a lot of times, with people who have addiction issues, who have issues around mental health. They need support, and they need a community that will be supportive to them.

Really, I think that government needs to pay much more attention to those issues, and not just because they will save us money. I know that's the government's argument that needs to be used. Will it be cost-effective? It will be cost-effective. We save on health care costs. We save in so many ways if we look after people who are homeless on our streets.

As a British Columbian and as a Canadian, I find it pretty horrific that we can call ourselves the best place on earth and gloat about our wealth. Yet at the same time, we can tolerate the homelessness on our streets, and we can tolerate the poverty in our families.

There's just a disconnect. Those images that we know of... We know of the challenges facing aboriginal people living on and off reserve, and I think there's that disconnect. The disconnect is between the slogans that make us feel good about ourselves and the reality that makes us think that we have to do much better. We have to do much better.

It's not appropriate to tolerate the level of poverty in this province. It is not appropriate for us to tolerate the level of homelessness. We have the ability. If we had the will, it would address those issues. We have the ability to do it. We have the ability to build social housing. We have the ability to make sure that people who need a home can find a place to live.

It's not enough to quote figures which say that we're putting this much more money into this or that. We need to measure. We need to make sure that in fact that money is spent in a way that is actually beneficial to the people and not somehow going to simply benefit a friend or a particular interest.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

I certainly believe that this budget doesn't go where it needs to go in order to create a society that's truly one that can be called a caring society. And as a Canadian first and foremost, I think it's part of our national pride to say that we look after one another. Whether you want to pretend that it's called socialism and want to read from some manifesto or you want to blame people from decades gone by, that's your issue. That's the government's issue. It's not my issue.

What I'd like to see is a government that actually pays attention to average folks, people who earn a living, to musicians in Vancouver or Prince George or Fort St. John or to poets living in Kelowna and Prince Rupert. These people are the fabric of our communities. They need to be supported. They don't just happen. It doesn't just happen on its own.

Our schools need to be adequately funded so that music programs aren't cut. If we're the best place on earth, we should have good music in our schools. We should have opportunities for kids to experience other cultures and broaden their horizons. What we're seeing now, in effect, in my opinion, is this sort of formula-driven administration that says: "This formula is right because we're following a formula."

[1730]

Now, per-student funding doesn't help us in the rural parts of our communities. We lose out. We're getting a differential level of education services.

I think this is something that the government needs to take a better look at. I think they've shown that they don't really understand the needs of average British Columbians. They know how to look after their own interests. They count on words and slogans carrying the day rather than substance. They count on people not understanding the reality of the impacts of their programs, and I think we all are worse off for that.

I would like to just conclude by saying that one day, perhaps, I'll talk about the good that's happening: a reduction in poverty, a reduction in homelessness, an increase in our production of arts and culture, a place where those values are nurtured and promoted and where our environment is actually protected and our values are secure.

With that, I'd like to cede the floor to the next speaker. I'm sorry this budget is in this way, but I expect nothing less.

Hon. I. Black: I rise to speak in support of Budget 2009. This budget was delivered by our Minister of Finance in the backdrop of some of the most fascinating and yet disturbing economic history since such information was recorded.

Never before in the 138-year history of the New York Stock Exchange had the index dropped to the extent that it had in an eight-month period, with the exception of one time, which was 1931. We have seen the

economic engine of countries around the world come to a virtual standstill, and in the shadow of that sits British Columbia, a province where, over the last number of years, we have seen spectacular growth, frankly, in the face of economic challenges which were inherited back in 2001.

We have seen some unprecedented improvement in British Columbia, where we've gone from being, by any reasonable measurement, last in this country.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Member, just one moment.

Are all members of the House prepared to listen and have respect for the person that has the floor so that we may continue?

Please continue, Minister.

Hon. I. Black: As countries around the world came to grips with what was happening and began making the plans necessary to reflect their own circumstances, British Columbia, within this country, did several things, led by the Premier.

In October British Columbia announced, in a very proactive manner, a ten-point plan to immediately start sending a message that we are aware of our circumstances, that there are tools within the toolkit of a government to make some meaningful steps and to send some important messages. The ten-point plan was delivered in October.

That included accelerating tax cuts, something for which our government is well known. It included insuring the credit union deposits so that our banking system — which, at the time, as many members will remember, was under incredible strain.... There was great fear in the banking community worldwide that these institutions that were presumably the safeguards of all of our savings were somehow in jeopardy. The step was taken to insure and assure members of credit unions throughout this province that their deposits were safe with them.

Because we are in a position of relative strength, we were also in a position to accelerate some infrastructure spending and do so in very meaningful ways to British Columbians, on which I'll touch in just a few moments.

But government also took some steps to send a message that says that as guardians of the people's money, we also have to ensure that we're doing what we need to do. So to the extent that government is also a spender and a consumer, the tightening of the belt took place in government, as well, as we looked at things like travel elimination, as we looked at discretionary expenditures elimination and curbing, as we started preparing for Budget 2009.

[1735]

As other jurisdictions across the country — and indeed, Canada itself — began rolling out their budgets, the numbers were staggering in many, many cases. Tens

of billions of dollars' deficits by our national government. Recently we learned that the province of Ontario has tabled a budget that puts them in a deficit position of \$18 billion.

We are not a government that likes deficits. It is part of our very fabric of who we are. We don't believe that spending more than we bring in is any wiser than a family spending more than it brings in on a monthly basis. We believe that it mortgages the future of our children and our grandchildren, and it is not consistent with how we view the world.

Yet in the reality of the certain times, we were left with a choice. We could balance the budget. It would involve cuts to health care, which have never happened under this administration. It would involve cuts to education, which have never happened under this administration. That was our choice. We could balance the budget in the way that we believe so passionately should be done, and it would involve making meaningful cuts to programs that we consider sacrosanct to the people of this province.

So we faced a deficit — not \$18 billion, but one that's about 96 percent smaller than \$18 billion, actually. We faced the reality that in order to continue the historical expenditures in these areas, we would face a deficit and embrace a small deficit next year and the year after that, with a commitment to balance the budget yet again in the third year out.

That would be the second time that this government has inherited circumstances that caused it to get the house in order which were not of our making. The first time was by the previous NDP government, who take great delight in challenging and suddenly trying to become immediate economic experts, which I find one part amusing and another part pathetic.

If you look at the backdrop in which all of this took place, we have come through an enormously prosperous time in the last six years, where this government has managed to pay down debt, to effectively eliminate the credit card spending of the previous government, and get ourselves back into a position where we have a foundation on which to go forward.

The formula for getting us there is one that we believe in. We believe in lowering taxes. We have seen the taxes for the average British Columbian drop by about 37 percent. We now have a situation in British Columbia where anyone earning \$116,000 or less pays lower taxes in British Columbia than anywhere else in the country. That's something of which I personally am very proud.

We also have a situation where we now have 250,000 of the employees in this province, 250,000 working people in British Columbia, who do not pay any provincial income tax at all. You can only do that on the strength of a strong economy.

We have announced as part of Budget 2009 the observation that a family of four earning \$70,000 a year now pays \$2,002 less per year, which is a reduction of 45 per-

cent. A single individual making \$20,000 now pays \$618 less per year, a reduction of 78 percent. A senior couple earning \$30,000 now pays \$71 less per year, a reduction of 100 percent.

A lot of the success we've enjoyed over the last number of years is because part of the approach of this government is that we believe in reaching out and forming collaborations and partnerships with different levels of government, with different groups throughout the province that have a vested interest in a strong and prosperous British Columbia.

We've reached out to the federal government not just of today but of yesterday — the federal Liberal government, the federal Conservative government. During the time we've been in office we've shown very clearly that we have the ability to work at a federal government level. We've shown the ability many times — that we have the ability to work with our municipal governments and ask them what they want. What do our municipalities in this province want for their citizens? What is their vision, and how can we help them reach that vision?

We spoke with our small business community, and we spoke with industry and asked them what they need to create the jobs and the prosperity for our citizens in this great province. The feedback I get from my great community, the community that crosses the Tri-Cities, is that this is the right approach. This is the right way to go.

[1740]

I think of the village of Anmore, one of the four municipalities that I have the honour of representing in this House. I think of Anmore and the challenge that they faced for ten years, where 700,000 cars came to their beautiful little community nestled along the Indian Arm and found themselves in position where they were damaging the lifeblood road in that community known as East Road — 1.5 kilometres of road that was absolutely becoming devastated by the amount of traffic that was on it, far more so than the 1,300 citizens who live in that beautiful little community would create on their own.

It was working in that spirit of collaboration with the village of Anmore and with the federal government that under this government we were able to come up with the necessary formula to provide the funding necessary to solve a ten-year-old problem for that great little community and repave and resurface that section of road.

It's such a small little piece of road relative to the massive road network of this province, but to the people of Anmore that is crucial. I'm proud of the fact that this government was able to help them solve a problem that was important to them.

I also think of the beautiful village of Belcarra, a second community that I'm so proud to represent in this House, a village that up until recently did not have safe drinking water and did not have a fire protection system because the water system just did not exist. Here

is a community of 700 or 800 people, for whom such a system would cost about \$6 million.

For a small community facing a challenge with some of the most basic types of services, that created an opportunity, in my view, to solve a problem that represented a perfect match between federal, municipal and provincial governments to take on that challenge. It was the perfect example of how senior levels of government should help municipalities.

We were able, in conjunction with our federal counterparts — again, working with the village of Belcarra — to bring to life a 15-year dream that they had. With equal funding from the province and the federal government, we were able to help bring that project to life and put \$4 million towards their \$6 million to \$6½ million project. To those communities, that represents collaboration and partnership and elected officials doing what they should do to help better the lives of their citizens. I'm proud that I was able to be a part of that.

I think also of the great city of Coquitlam. Coquitlam has such a wonderful, diverse population, certainly much larger than the beautiful villages of Anmore and Belcarra, and a community, Mr. Speaker, that I know you're also proud to represent as well.

I think of the Chimo Pool, a facility that is one of the newest and most accessible for wheelchair swimmers and for senior citizens, the people who have the opportunity to take advantage of the most creative and modern approaches to recreational facilities that include all elements of our society.

That pool was built, again, because the federal and provincial government were willing to work and fund, in conjunction with the city of Coquitlam, that magnificent facility. It's a facility I've had a chance to use many times with my kids.

To see it so full of young families and to see our senior citizens participating in active and healthy lifestyles in our community, directly because of the results of working together with different levels of government, is one reason for people to get into politics and public life. I'm proud that I was able to be part of that project as well.

I also think about our libraries, and I think about the fact that in Coquitlam, one of them required some major renovations. Again, we found the way by working in partnership with the city and with the federal government to renovate the Coquitlam Library.

The fourth community that I'm so proud to represent is Port Moody. As the MLA for Port Moody–Westwood I've had a chance to work with all of our municipalities. In Port Moody I look to the West Hill pedestrian trail. Through our government, we were in a position to start help take cars off the roads, help encourage people to have bicycle paths and pedestrian paths that were safe.

West Hill pedestrian path is in a part of Port Moody that has a very dangerous and very steep hill in it. It certainly is not where you'd want your children to be

playing and where people who are not as steady on their feet should be walking. This is a place where a path like this and a pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly path should be built, and I'm very, very pleased that we were able to do that.

More recently, again in conjunction with the federal government, we were able to put the funding in place to solve a major transportation problem in our area as well, the Ioco bridge in Port Moody, and work with the federal and the municipal government to bring that to life as well.

Last week I had the honour of representing the government at the sod turning in the city of Port Coquitlam, which of course is represented by the member for Port Coquitlam–Burke Mountain. It was Iris House, a facility that has been, again, the result of collaboration and cooperation with different levels of government and different organizations.

[1745]

The New View Society, which is such an important member of our community in the work that they do, and B.C. Housing turned the sod on this ten-bed transition house, which will be focused on working with people with mental illness and drug addiction, and on helping people restructure their lives, and start working on their personal goals and aspirations. I'm very pleased that we could be part of that.

I think of what's happened in the area of homelessness and the actions that have been taken over the last number of years. I think of the 45 buildings that are now owned by this government, which weren't owned five or six years ago — 24 of them in the downtown core.

I think of the fact that we've gone from spending about \$120 million a year on the homelessness file to spending over \$400 million. Those are very impressive numbers. Spending over three times what we were just a short time ago is something that we can point to, to say that we're serious about this challenge that has to be overcome.

There's an example closer to home which I'm familiar with and very proud of. It involves the Hope for Freedom Society in our area. It's run by a gentleman by the name of Rob Thiessen. It's a program that was piloted by our government three or four years ago, and during that time the Hope for Freedom Society tried something different. They went into the areas where the homeless people were, and they tried to connect them with social services, bring them to the services that would make a meaningful difference in their lives, and connect them with shelter, with health services and with food.

In that time the pilot was extended because we realized we were onto something good. Not only was it extended from a one-year pilot by an additional three years, but we now have 45 different Hope for Freedom-type equivalents around British Columbia on the success of such an important project that was started in the Tri-Cities.

We're very proud of that fact, because we've tripped over something that works. It works well, and we've

funded it. We're very, very proud of the fact that of the 235 or 240 identified homeless people in the Tri-Cities, we connected 190 of them with supports. They are still connected with those supports. That is progress on a very, very challenging issue, and it shows that we are trying to make a meaningful difference in that problem.

I had the honour of speaking two weeks ago at the Soroptimists annual luncheon, a group of women who make extraordinary contributions to our community. In preparing to make some remarks with them, I realized that in the Tri-Cities — which is about 200,000 to 225,000 people — we have over 3,000 families who are currently receiving the support of our government, whether it's through housing supplements, SAFER allowances or rental assistance, etc. It is almost \$20 million that goes into the Tri-Cities alone in this area.

The collaboration that I spoke of earlier actually goes even further. I think of the Coquitlam school district, school district 43. I think of the fact that our education budget when we took office was about \$7.7 billion and is now over \$10.7 billion in size, looking at Budget 2009.

I look at the fact that it's forecast to increase by another \$228 million over the next three years — in the face of declining enrolment, in the case of K-to-12 education. In school district 43 it's almost 4,000 students — from about 33,000 or 34,000 down to about 30,000 or slightly below. This is a meaningful commitment to the public education system, and it's one that I'm very proud of.

When I opened my remarks, I talked about the ten-point plan that the Premier rolled out in October, and I talked about accelerated expenditures. One of the areas that was the target of that accelerated expenditure was the seismic programs in our schools. I was proud to be with you, Mr. Speaker, a few weeks ago when we stood up and announced a \$102 million program in the school district of Coquitlam 43 — largest one it's ever seen.

In that program, as you well remember, we saw three schools that were announced that are going to be completely replaced and three that are going to be upgraded. I think of Maillard Middle School, Miller Park School and Ranch Park School, which are going to receive the crucial seismic upgrading.

I think of Centennial Secondary School, one of the hallmark and oldest schools in our area, and James Park and Pitt River Community Middle School, which are going to be fully replaced as a result of that investment into the safety of our children and the investment into the public education system and the needed infrastructure that we have there.

I'm involved right now in probably one of the most interesting and encouraging collaboration efforts since I've had the honour of taking this job. I'm involved right now in working with some parents, two of them in particular. This is a group of six, but two of them in particular, Deanna Jones and Mark Sekela.

[1750]

These are two parents and their colleagues — there's a group of them — who came to me about a year ago. They came to me because they said that they understood that school populations were dropping in our area. They understood that. They understood that our funding to education had gone up despite that. They understood that as well. But they said: "We have an issue, and the issue looks like this."

While across Tri-Cities, for which school district 43 is responsible.... Yes, the student populations are dropping as an average right across that area. In the northern part of Port Moody and around the village of Anmore we're actually seeing growth — measurable, identifiable growth — in families with school-aged children.

There is a need that they identified, and the need was for a new middle school. I have spent the last year working with this group, working with the school district superintendent, the secretary-treasurer, the assistant superintendent, ministry officials, the village of Anmore and the city of Port Moody.

We've made some meaningful progress in this area, and it's a tribute, frankly, to these parents who believed that this should happen and who are continuing to push and continuing to see that their needs are met through their elected representatives at these different levels.

It has been a humbling lesson in democracy and a humbling lesson in listening to your constituents, and we are making great progress. We're going through the zoning process right now with the village of Anmore, which must be complete before the final steps go into place. We're not done yet. There are still some challenges ahead, but we're spurred on, we're cheered on, and we're held accountable, frankly, by this incredible group of parents. I'd be remiss in standing here today if I didn't acknowledge their incredible efforts.

We are also heavily involved in collaboration when it comes to policing. My riding is served by two police forces. The Port Moody police force, who proudly have their motto "No call too small," are a fantastic group of officers with an inspiring chief and have made a tremendous presence and contribution to our community. We are also served so capably by the RCMP detachment based out of Coquitlam, whose detachment has been tireless in working not just in Coquitlam but also through to the villages of Anmore and Belcarra, for which they have responsibility as well.

I meet regularly with the police in our community, and I hear the dropping crime rates in many areas, but there's no doubt that you can avoid the concerns that are currently happening in the media, that are being reflected through the communities in the province.

I've been dealing a lot with my constituents in the last number of weeks and dealing a lot with the police as well, in conversations with them. In those conversations there's an acknowledgment that there is much that has been done and yet more that needs to change. Those

reflective comments are such that they recognize that we've put 89 percent more into the policing budget than that which we inherited in 2001, and they recognize that some of the more creative things we've done in this area have also produced real results in our area.

I think specifically of the traffic fine revenues program, which at one point was such that all the traffic fines collected were distributed back to the municipalities around the province to about the 50 percent level of what was collected. We promised to increase that to 75 percent, but on the strength of a strong economy we were able to deliver more. We actually took it up to 100 percent of the fines collected being delivered back to our community.

In Port Moody that has meant an additional \$1.6 million just to Port Moody, in addition to their full police budget. In the situation in Coquitlam with the RCMP, it's been \$5.5 million given back to those policing-for-public-safety types of activities. Over 950 more officers than what we had five or six years ago. We've now got more joint forces operations existing in British Columbia than in any other jurisdiction in the country.

We've got our Civil Forfeiture Act, which is designed to take the profit out of crime, because that ultimately, I believe, is one of the keys in solving this problem. If crime is not attractive, people aren't going to commit it. We have the opportunity, through the Civil Forfeiture Act, to hit the criminal element where it hurts the most, which is the wallet. That has been a very, very successful piece of legislation.

We've also invested in computer technology to start integrating the data flow between the various police forces — seeing \$44 million invested in computer technology. Yet we still have situations where bail is too easily given. We still have situations where we've got two-for-one being offered, in terms of time served in a holding cell before a trial being credited on a two-for-one basis after the conviction. We also are lacking mandatory minimum sentencing around drug convictions.

Those things are also to be the subject of collaboration and cooperation. On those things we will continue to work with our federal governments to ensure that they understand the needs of this province and that such changes are made.

[1755]

I also think of the collaboration in the area of health care. We are served in my great community by the Fraser Health Authority. The Fraser Health Authority has a new chief executive officer — he's been there about a year now or a little over a year — Dr. Nigel Murray. Dr. Nigel Murray has been working on the strategic plan for the Fraser Health Authority, and it involves a hospital, in the beautiful city of Port Moody, called Eagle Ridge.

The Eagle Ridge Hospital also has a hospital foundation. The hospital foundation is made up of some enthusiastic, highly committed, highly intelligent and highly capable

citizens of Port Moody. They've got a vision. They've got a vision for Eagle Ridge Hospital to be more than it currently is. They've got a vision for Eagle Ridge Hospital to be fully utilized, because there's space within it for more use.

They know that I support them, they know that I share their vision, and they know that I have communicated these thoughts with Dr. Murray, and that Dr. Murray is seriously contemplating how best to use Eagle Ridge Hospital in delivering health services across the Fraser Health Authority.

Budget 2009 has got additional spending. It's got additional spending of which 90 percent of all new spending goes into the area of health. I support that sense of priority, and I know that the citizens of my community support it as well. An additional \$4.8 billion over the next three years is going into our health care system. Those are the choices that our government has made, and those are the right choices for the people of Port Moody–Westwood.

I think, however, the best example of collaboration that I've had a chance to witness, the most exciting example of collaboration that I've had a chance to witness over my time here, has been the news item that has occupied our local newspapers more than any other — and most pointedly in the last six weeks. That is, after 20 years and many, many false starts, the Tri-Cities is receiving rapid transit in the form of the Evergreen line being committed to — fully funded and delivered to the people of our community.

It has been an exciting couple of weeks with the announcement by the federal government declaring specifically their funding commitment and with our government working with them through that time after we made our own funding commitment a couple of years ago. Our community has had one false start after another.

When I first moved to the Tri-Cities, there was talk about rapid transit being brought. I had no idea at the time that that conversation had been going on for quite some time. The promise at the time was this thing called the Millennium line.

It's a great transit system. I used it just the other day. I can go from Lougheed Mall to Burnaby in about seven and a half to eight minutes, which is really impressive. I can't drive it in three times that amount — the far end of Burnaby where I was going, that is.

There's a problem. The problem is that when that line was first envisioned, it was supposed to come all the way to the Tri-Cities. Lougheed Mall, in the corner of where Coquitlam and Burnaby meet, is not servicing the Tri-Cities. This was a project that was supposed to go into the heart of the Tri-Cities, and what happened with it?

Under the previous administration, this project went two and a half times over budget, it went two thirds of the distance, and every family in my community was taxed an average of \$2,800 for a rapid transit system that never came anywhere near them.

This time it's done right. This time the get-it-done attitude of our government got it done, and here's how it looks. We were the first provincial government to actually put a business plan together, to put together a business plan around the Evergreen line. I know that's a novel concept for the members opposite. "Write cheques now; check it out later" was kind of their policy.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Would the member for Yale-Lillooet please refrain from interfering with the speaker, allowing the respect of the House to continue.

That goes for all members of the House.

Please continue, Minister.

Hon. I. Black: We were the first government in British Columbia's history to actually put a business plan together around a \$1.2 billion plan. Neat concept, huh? Not only that. We then took that business plan and were the first provincial government to actually take it to Ottawa. Instead of having a conversation over a cup of coffee about maybe getting involved in the Evergreen line, a formal business plan was presented to the government.

Over that time and over the last three years, we got our cities on board. We got the TransLink folks on board. We got the provincial government on board, and we got the federal government on board as well, and we worked through it. It wasn't easy, but we stuck to it. With the commitment of our Transportation Minister, with the commitment of the Premier, we managed to get it done, and the Evergreen line in my riding is now a reality.

[1800]

In closing, let me reflect on a couple of things. We now find ourselves at a crossroads, a crossroads where we've paid off the credit card debt of the previous government. We have taken ourselves and paid down the provincial debt and, in doing so, diversified our economy. We have taken away some of the reliance on the United States, such that the reliance on trade with the U.S., relative to Ontario and Quebec, is about a third less.

We've opened up doorways to Asia, which are bearing fruit for us in Korea, in China and in India. We put in place tax policies that put more cash in the pockets of our families for them to make the decisions for what's right for their families, something that we on this side passionately believe to be the priority. We put in place tax policies that incent job growth — one of the reasons why our province is more resilient than any other economic jurisdiction in North America and why, as we work through this difficult time, we will bounce back sooner, and we will bounce back higher.

We have relied upon and developed and improved upon trade agreements, interprovincially and cross-border, which give certainty to our key industries and

certainty to the families that depend on them both now and going forward.

It has been part of a deliberate and a judicious plan. We have now got a cushion that most other provinces do not have, that most other western geographies and economies do not have.

Our foundation remains strong, and our people, the men and women of this province, remain resilient, whether they're in the office towers or in the remote and rural communities throughout British Columbia.

We will build on our strengths. We will leverage our skills and our ingenuity of our small business community, we will embrace the magic and the promise of the Olympic Games, we will build a better British Columbia, and across this province we will all benefit from that.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: If I could remind all members of the House to please have respect for the person that has the floor and is speaking.

S. Herbert: I rise to join the budget debate, and the first thing I'd like to say is to thank my constituents in Vancouver-Burrard for putting their trust in me such a short time ago with our by-election and to get my chance to join in this discussion of our provincial budget.

This is my first budget debate, so I hope the hon. members will hear my words as I share with them what I've learned from the members opposite, as well as from the members on this side of the House and from the budget documents themselves.

Based on what I've learned, there is no way, in good conscience, that I can support this budget. Why? I don't believe it can be trusted. I don't believe this government can be trusted. Why? I do not believe this budget rises to the occasion of our economic tough times and the challenges facing our families and our communities. Why? I believe that it has the wrong priorities in tough times and that this government has the wrong priorities for B.C.

I'm a young man, but I'm not naive, and I had big expectations for how this House worked, as I've told the members before. I have big expectations for a government that promised to be the most open and accountable government ever, in the best place on earth.

I must say I have been disappointed with what goes on here, as the members have heard me say before, but I believe it is important to say, because I believe many members across our province are disappointed at how this House operates. They want us to make things different. They want positive change, and they want government that brings them together.

I've also learned many words and ways to say things that change the meaning of what's actually being said. Whether it's talking about tripling of budgets.... Then I go back, and you look at the figures, and well, it's

called tripling because just before the date they say, they slash the budget, and then they add money back again so it looks like a triple. But really it is, sometimes, a reduction.

I learned favourite words of the members of the government side, and the favourite word that I seem to hear is "unprecedented." We have an unprecedented economic crisis. We have the government claiming unprecedented levels of support for various ministries. We have unprecedented meetings and summits announced, unprecedented levels of so-called action on homelessness, unprecedented action....

Interjections.

S. Herbert: I do have plenty more. Thanks for the respect. I appreciate that you like the action of the way I'm going here. I wouldn't be surprised for one of the members opposite, maybe the member for Kamloops-North Thompson, to say that they are the most unprecedented government in history. Maybe the new slogan for B.C. will be: "B.C., the province without precedent."

[1805]

I'm tired of this word, and the reason I say that is because there is a precedent for all of these things. To suggest otherwise is to suggest our province has no history. I know we are a young province, but we do have precedents. We do have history.

Our province lived through the Depression. Our province worked through the Second World War. Our province lived through the challenges of the '70s and inflation. Our province made it through the challenges of a downturn in the Asian markets in the '90s and the tough challenges faced in the early years of this government due to their brutal cuts and sell-offs of public assets, after promising not to.

They are precedents for tough times, times where the good people of B.C. pulled together and supported each other, times where we put our collective heads together to come up with the solutions that worked, times when we were greater than we are, times when we reached higher to do what we need to do for the best of all of us.

We are in such a tough time again, and the government has brought what they claim is unprecedented action. Well, it's not unprecedented, but it certainly is close to being unprecedented for being one of the most disappointing budgets in B.C. history.

It is a budget that does not understand our time, that does not understand what the people of British Columbia are calling on us for. This is a budget from a government that has failed to rise to the moment. In a time when people are looking for stability and confidence in their government, this is a budget of slash and burn. It's a budget of missed opportunities and shortsightedness.

The Finance Minister said it all comes down to one word: confidence. I agree with him. I agree with that

statement. This budget really does come down to one word, confidence. But his definition of confidence and mine might be different.

He suggests that we should trust the government, that we should be confident that what the government says in the budget will actually be what happens. Well, the Finance Minister has said, and we have heard from other members of this government, that what's said in the budget today may very well be different from what happens after the election, when another revised budget is brought in.

So basically, there's an election budget and then, should the minister return as Finance Minister, he'll change and create a new budget.

Interjections.

S. Herbert: We've seen that in the history of this government and specific, I think, to 2005, to 2001. And we'll get there, hon. Members.

So what you see now is likely not what you will get. This budget and this government cannot be trusted, and that's not confidence.

It also states in the budget document that there are still \$250 million or so in budget cuts that still need to be made. Again, the dollars you're promised now may disappear at a whim. When I've built budgets for small arts organizations, for businesses, for my family, I would never get away with what this minister is trying to do here. My board of directors would never accept it, and neither would my family.

The word "confidence" means the public needs to believe the words of this government. Well, we've seen how this government rewards the trust of their people.

When they promised not to privatize B.C. Rail, after the election they broke that promise. When they promised not to tear up contracts, they broke that promise and tore up health workers' contracts. They went after our teachers and went after those who worked so hard to make our province great. They broke their word and broke the voters' trust and showed us that they cannot be trusted.

I think about the government's children's budget, which was going to put children first. Well, five years on, B.C. still has the worst child poverty rate in Canada. So that budget never did its job. That budget couldn't be trusted.

I go back again to the Finance Minister's call for confidence. Well, as we've seen, they never have confidence in their own budgets, because they can never follow through on what actually is meant to happen out of their budgets.

We also had a housing budget that was going to make the difference in dealing with homelessness. But then what did we see? Little action, and the number of homeless people on the streets, in our parks and in our communities up 373 percent.

I talked to those people on my streets, on the streets of Vancouver-Burrard. I talked to those people living in the forests of Stanley Park, and I know where they came from. They used to live in rental buildings. But again, the government does not seem to care about those people. I know they try to care, and they say they care, but because of the lack of action, they ended up on the streets and are continuing to live on the streets. So again, their word cannot be trusted.

They promised to be the most open and accountable government in history. It was a good goal and one we should all aim for, but we have seen the government systematically do whatever they can to escape scrutiny, to escape accountability and to close off the public.

[1810]

On this very budget, when it comes to accountability and openness, so far they've refused to debate the estimates of what they're spending. They've so far refused to debate how the money's going to be spent, and this is billions and billions of dollars of taxpayers' money.

I think back to local accountable governments, municipal governments who have to debate and justify \$30,000 of spending. Here we have billions, and they refuse to go to estimates on that, instead jumping to supplementary estimates. Again, that does not give me a lot of confidence.

I'd like to remind the members opposite that in January we saw tens of thousands of jobs disappear. That doesn't make me very confident. It doesn't make me or any of my constituents confident that the government gets what actually is going on, on the street, in the homes or in our community centres.

Today we saw the Finance Minister claiming that a few hundred jobs lost at Hastings Park are basically okay because, well, maybe they can find another job somewhere else. "Don't worry about it" seems to be this government's response to criticism, to be their response to challenges facing my constituents. "Oh, someday it'll be fine, and besides, it's not you we're looking out for. You'll find some other job somewhere else sometime in the future, but in the end we're watching our bottom line."

That's not a response. That's not a confident response. I think if it were a confident response, they would say really what they're going to do, instead of pointing the finger somewhere else, somewhere back in the past. I heard the minister opposite at one point talk about 1986.

Deputy Speaker: Through the Chair, please.

S. Herbert: He talked about '86. Then it was '96. I'm not sure when he was talking about. Oh, and then I heard another member opposite talk about.... I think it was the '20s, or was that the '30s?

Interjection.

S. Herbert: The '30s. He talked about the '30s. That was an interesting historical departure. But I think we're talking about today and the future and the present day of our families, of our communities and what we are facing.

That kind of pointing the finger somewhere else and saying, "Don't worry; trust us," does not lead to confidence. That leads to anger and frustration.

Just when we hear about job losses on top of the thousands and thousands of job losses in the forestry sector, we hear about a massive cut by this government that they aim to make to the arts and culture budget, to a sector that has been leading the way in job creation. This government's all-out attack on arts and culture — with a cut of support of 50 percent in 2010-2011, 2011-2012 — is shocking and will be devastating to our collective future.

Over 117,000 people are employed in the cultural sector in B.C. alone. That's about 5 percent of the B.C. labour force. On average, between 1996 and 2003, cultural output contributed almost 4 percent of the provincial GDP. This is a big player in our province, one that I know the government has spoken about in the past and has attempted to make some forward improvement in what they're doing for the lot of the arts and culture sector. But that's all gone, with these cuts that they plan.

Study after study has shown that investing in the arts and culture industry provides a disproportionate economic stimulus on local communities, compared to other sectors. It's an investment.

The Conference Board of Canada has shown that the culture sector impacts Canada's GDP to the tune of \$84.6 billion in direct and indirect benefits. For every dollar you put in, the government gets about \$1.86 back in taxes, so it's actually an investment which pays off. It's not a subsidy that never pays off, never goes anywhere, as the other members opposite seem to suggest on a number of occasions.

Communities like Nelson, Langley, Kelowna, Pemberton, Vancouver, Victoria — they've all recognized the benefit of investing in arts and culture and a creative economy. But for some reason, this government seems to believe that cutting those budget supports is the right way forward. I absolutely disagree.

In a time when the economy is predicted to shrink, why would the government take an axe to a sector that is growing our economy? It doesn't add up, doesn't make sense, which again leads to my lack of confidence in this budget.

The creative sector has been leading the way in job creation. So when we're losing thousands of jobs, this is absolutely the wrong way to go. During the Great Depression, Roosevelt understood it and supported the arts in a massive way. Now President Obama, as well, is supporting the arts in a massive way and getting his nation out of a recession.

But what does our Premier do? He cuts supports to the arts and culture industry by 50 percent, which will

destroy years and years of growth and thousands of jobs. This is not the way forward. This is not the way forward for our rural communities. This is not the way forward for our urban communities. This is not the right way forward for B.C.

[1815]

These cuts take us out of the running in terms of provincial support for the arts and put us at the back of the pack nationally. This is the wrong time and the wrong plan. In a time when we need to be looking out for those sectors which are improving our economy and which are stimulating our economy, this government, with this budget and their service plans, has put their back to the industry after taking an axe to it. I am very, very disappointed.

I cannot support this budget, because this government seems to have forgotten who they are supposed to serve, and that's everyday British Columbians. Their priorities are out of touch with the challenges faced by my constituents, by their constituents, by the people of B.C.

In a time when family incomes are stagnant or going down, as I just read in a recent study, this government seems to think that it makes sense to increase their own salaries. I seem to remember the Premier's salary increasing by something like 50 percent, and that doesn't make a lot of sense to me or to my constituents, many who are living very challenged.

I think of my own colleagues here, and this seems to have struck a nerve with the members opposite. My colleagues here have been donating that increase to charities in their own constituencies, which is the right thing to do. It makes sense because it supports those people in our communities who are doing so much to make it better, rather than just sucking it back and putting it in their pockets — and I don't think that's right.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members. Member.

Can we please allow the speaker to have the floor without interruption.

Continue, Member.

S. Herbert: I was saying that I don't think that's the right priority. I think the priority should be the money back into our economy and into our communities, not making ourselves here richer. In a time when student debt loads are at record highs, this government seems to think that the top priority of this government should be increasing their top advisers' salaries by up to 43 percent. Again, I know it works for them, but it's not working for the people of B.C.

This government, again thinking about priorities, seems to think that a new, fancy roof on B.C. Place is the top priority, with the spending of \$300 million, \$350

million, \$365 million — this, when the earthquake-proofing of our schools is way behind schedule and when our emergency rooms are overcrowded. I guess a fancy roof and fancy corporate boxes are the top priority of this government.

I hear from my constituents in that area. They look at this plan that this government has come up with, a plan which relies on condo sales, a plan which relies on getting rid of affordable housing in that area and on getting rid of family housing in that area, a plan which relies on taking public goods in those areas like parks, like community centres, like child care. Instead, corporate boxes and fancy projects.

I know that's the Minister of Health's priority. He thinks that's the top priority of the government, and they think that that's the number one piece for everybody. I think I look to my constituents....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members.
Continue.

S. Herbert: I know my constituents worry a lot about putting roofs over the people who are sleeping homeless on the streets. They worry about keeping the roofs over their own heads, and that's their priority, but I know the government thinks this is the top priority.

I want to share how I made my mind up on this budget. I needed to feel confident that this budget would do what was needed to help our people through these tough times. I turned to the history of the B.C. Liberal government's ability to do what they said they were going to do, and I found, like many British Columbians believe, that this government cannot be trusted. We've seen that, whether it's the highest child poverty rate for five years in a row, a 373 percent increase in homelessness, reducing the minimum wage to \$6 for first-time workers and then maintaining the minimum wage for eight years, keeping people in poverty.

In tough economic times when more people are feeling threatened, we saw what they did to deal with the poverty that existed in good economic times, and that's not a good record of caring for people. That's not a good record for watching our backs and my constituents' backs. That's a record of disappointment. That's a record of massively increasing inequality between those who have a lot and the rest of us.

This is the record of a government who is trying to convince us, once again, that they care about the average British Columbian. "We'll watch out for you, for the average British Columbian, if they lose their job." We've seen what happens when people have lost their jobs. We've seen what happens when people are homeless, and we've seen what happens when people are stuck on

a minimum wage so that they can't even afford to get a home, because the minimum wage has been so low for so long.

[1820]

I think that is a disappointing record and one that does not give me or my constituents a lot of trust in what this government does. I don't believe this budget can be trusted to tell the truth about what's actually going to happen or what's actually going to be happening to British Columbians should this government get re-elected.

In my constituency we've seen many British Columbians thrown out of their rental apartments, again because the government put their priorities of their corporate friends before the needs of a balanced tenant-landlord relationship. They closed residential tenancy offices across this province, making it more difficult for people to have access to justice.

I looked at what the Finance Minister said and at this government's actions, and based on this history, I'm very concerned that after this election this government will bring in a new budget, as this one will likely go unpassed, and they will unleash a campaign of massive cuts to the public services we all rely on. We all remember those massive cuts they gave before, and we've heard about more and more cuts coming, like the 50 percent cut heading towards arts and culture should this government continue to get its way.

This is what they did in 2001. This is what they did in 2005. This government cannot be trusted.

I looked at this budget to see if it made sense economically and for the benefit of people in these tough economic times. Moving forward, as I've mentioned before, with cuts of 50 percent to the arts and culture industry will destroy thousands of jobs and slash revenue for the government coffers — not smart and not good policy. It will take an axe to the creative economy, which has been growing, which has been really leading the way in job creation and bringing good jobs to our communities, creative jobs to our communities, the jobs of tomorrow that we all seek to bring to our communities. This is not smart, to be cutting these jobs back. It's not good for the economy.

I think about the lack of action for students who are facing the crippling debt loads, as I mentioned earlier, and know again that it's not good economics to graduate people, if they can afford to, with bleak futures and crippling debt loads.

Finally, I looked at what the government's priorities are, and I've heard from the Minister of Health that St. Paul's Hospital in my community could face a bleak future if the government continues down the road, possibly. I've heard these words, that these are up for consideration post-election.

They've been talking about and looking at taking core services out of the hospital, whether that's the heart clinic.... I spoke with the minister, and the Minister

of Health said they were thinking of all possibilities. He was saying "all possibilities." Whether or not it was taking programs, whether it was keeping it where it was, whether or not it was moving the hospital....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order. Order, please.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

S. Herbert: What I'm referring to, to the hon. Minister of Health, is comments that I've read in the paper about how all options are on the table. I remember, and I wrote it down just to make sure that I got it right. All options are on the table. That was what I heard from the hon. Minister of Health, and that was his suggestion.

I'm disappointed that he would not confirm that this hospital would be staying in my community. He said: "Well, after the election, we'll figure out what's going on."

I understand that that's his suggestion, but I would like to see this hospital stay in my community and be revitalized in my community.

I know the hon. minister certainly could be convinced to do that, and I hope he will be.

I notice the Speaker is in the House, so noting the hour, I would like to reserve my place on this debate, and adjourn the debate until the next day.

S. Herbert moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. B. Penner moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 6:24 p.m.

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