



Fifth Session, 38th Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF
**DEBATES OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, March 24, 2009
Afternoon Sitting
Volume 40, Number 7

THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

ISSN 0709-1281

PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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

FIFTH SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2009

The House met at 1:36 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Introductions by Members

Hon. C. Hansen: Today in the members' gallery we have a very special visitor from Austria. I am pleased to introduce His Excellency Werner Brandstetter, the Ambassador of Austria to Canada. The ambassador is conducting his first official visit to British Columbia. He is accompanied by Mr. David Haber, honorary consul of Austria in Vancouver.

As you may know, Austria was the host of the 1964 and the 1976 Winter Olympics. I'm very much looking forward to my meeting with the ambassador later this afternoon, at which time I will assure him on behalf of the Canadian Olympic team that there are many silver and bronze medals that are up for grabs. Thank you for making them all very welcome today.

Hon. G. Campbell: I am proud to introduce members of the board of directors of the B.C. Veterans Commemorative Association. They're with us here in the gallery today. They've done exceptional work across the province, particularly over the last number of years, as they've reached out to people in every community to explain the role that veterans have played in creating our quality of life.

Lt. Col. Archie Steacy and his wife, Lynda Steacy; Sharel Fraser; Capt. Jerry Couling and his wife, Dominique Michel; Sgt.-Maj. Ben Nizio and his wife, Sheila Nizio; Cpl. Edwin Hawthorne and his wife, Gayle Hawthorne are all here in the gallery with us today.

As you know, they spearheaded the BC150 project, which took the experience of the veterans from across British Columbia to all people and communities and schools and local community associations. The On Guard for Thee program helped those communities across the province recognize the contribution of our veterans.

It seems to me that when we live in a time like this, where we all recognize the challenges that people face, we should also recognize the exceptional sacrifices that our veterans made on behalf of all of us. They didn't know who we were, but because of their contributions, generation after generation of Canadians has really benefited from the freedom and the democracy that we all enjoy here today. I hope we'll make them all welcome.

H. Lali: Today visiting us — actually, since yesterday — are some folks from Lillooet and area.

They're here meeting with a number of ministers, yesterday and today, on a number of issues that are

important to them in the community. Joining us in the galleries are Mayor Dennis Bontron, Coun. Greg Kamenka and Coun. Patrick St. Dennis, along with the administrator, Grant Loyer. As well, accompanying them is the chief of the T'it'q'et Indian band, Chief Bill Machell. Would the House please give them a warm Victoria welcome.

Tributes

BENNIE YUNG

Hon. G. Campbell: I am sorry today to rise in the House to inform the House of the passing of Bennie Yung. Bennie was a successful Richmond businessman and a 34-year resident of Canada who believed in putting his community before himself. His dedication to making our province a better place was recognized with the Queen's Jubilee Medal in 2003.

[1340]

From serving as an adult education tutor to being the founding director of the Association of Chinese Canadian Professionals, serving on more than 15 community and volunteer boards, Bennie once said that he spent more time volunteering than he did with his business. The province, the city of Richmond and Canada are stronger for the contributions that Bennie Yung made, and I hope that we will send our condolences to his family.

Introductions by Members

J. McGinn: I am pleased to welcome today 45 students from Vancouver Talmud Torah School, which is the largest Jewish traditional school in Vancouver if not in British Columbia.

I would love to welcome those students who are here from grade 5, as well as five of their teachers: Lisa Romalis, Lily Bouskila, Doreen Papadopoulos, Russell Der and Gerrald Lotzkar, as well as the accompanying parents Max Pinsky, Wendi Klein, Katherine Arnold and Ruth Zvi.

Certainly, most people know the importance that Vancouver Talmud Torah plays in our society. They teach the students about the importance of Jewish culture as well as how to be active members in Canadian society as well as members of their faith community. I would like to ask everyone to say *shalom* to our friends from Talmud Torah.

Hon. I. Chong: Visiting us today in the gallery are some very good friends of mine. They have lived throughout greater Victoria and moved several times. So they've been constituents of many of us here, but needless to say, they have been very strong community and business leaders here. I would like the House to

please welcome Brian Butler and his partner and friend Ann Lindsay.

Tributes

JUAN DE FUCA GRIZZLIES HOCKEY TEAM

J. Horgan: I want to join with the member for East Kootenay in congratulating the Juan de Fuca Grizzlies bantam double-A team, which completed its undefeated season by crushing Cranbrook 7-6 last week in Powell River.

Introductions by Members

J. Horgan: If I could indulge the Attorney General and do a bit of a riff off of the Talking Heads, this may not be my beautiful house, but up there is my beautiful wife, Ellie Horgan.

J. Nuraney: In the gallery today we have members of the Fiji Canada seniors council, who are visiting us here in Victoria. They are Edward Palad, the president; Norindra Tesram; Sam Niker; and Sam Sidal. I would like the House to please join me in offering them a very special welcome.

Hon. L. Reid: We are joined in the gallery today by a remarkable woman, no stranger to this place, having spent more than a decade employed with us here in the province of British Columbia. I'd like all members to welcome Terri Cunningham.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

FOREST AMENDMENT ACT, 2009

Hon. P. Bell presented a message from His Honour the Administrator: a bill intituled Forest Amendment Act, 2009.

Hon. P. Bell: I move that Bill 13 be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

Hon. P. Bell: Today I introduce Bill 13, which proposes several amendments to the Forest Act. Today's bill improves operating certainty for community forest agreement holders and allows woodlot licences to expand their role in the forest sector.

These changes will create revenue and benefits not only for small tenure holders themselves but for the communities that they operate in. The bill also encourages all licensees in British Columbia to fully use and value our forest resources.

Bill 13 also responds to points identified during the regulatory review. By expanding the reasons cutting permit postponements may be approved for licensees in British Columbia, licensees will have the ability to have greater flexibility and ensure that the maximum value of our wood resource is utilized.

[1345]

Hon. Speaker, I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading of the House after today.

Bill 13, Forest Amendment Act, 2009, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Statements

(Standing Order 25B)

OIL TANKER MORATORIUM

G. Coons: Today marks 20 years since the oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* hit a reef, spewing 40 million litres of crude oil into the waters of Prince William Sound, Alaska. Some 20 years later oil can still be found on the beaches, the herring fishery has completely collapsed, and the health and social implications of this disaster linger on.

Today many groups across the province are gathered to pay memorial to the fish, birds, whales and coastal communities devastated by this tragic accident. The lessons of this travesty cannot be ignored. Crude oil spills are still inevitable. Spill cleanup technology has improved little in 20 years, with a spill cleanup rate of 15 percent considered successful.

Northern B.C. communities and first nations are facing crude oil projects through their salmon rivers and oil tankers through their ecologically rich marine waterways. Their attempts to push aside a 37-year tanker moratorium along British Columbia's inside waters, which has survived eight Prime Ministers and nine B.C. Premiers.... Recent polling shows 77 percent of British Columbians feel that affected communities should have a first say in deciding if crude oil tankers should be allowed on our coast.

Proposed tanker routes include the waterways along the Great Bear rain forest and through the fragile marine ecosystems of Tsimshian and Haida traditional territory. The Nuxalk, the Heiltsuk, the Oweekeno and especially the Gitga'at from Hartley Bay are all distressed with the thought of supertankers loaded with dirty oil from Alberta's tar sands travelling through B.C.'s sensitive Inside Passage.

In a recent Gitga'at press release entitled "Disaster Déjà vu in Canada's Great Bear Rain Forest," band councillor Cameron Hill stated that there is nothing but

risk in this whole process for the Gitga'at people. There are no benefits.

Leading environmental groups, first nations and thousands of concerned citizens have declared today, March 24, as Canada's no-tanker day. It's time to strengthen the existing tanker moratorium through a legislated prohibition on crude oil tanker traffic in our sensitive northern waters.

SPIRIT OF 2010 HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

R. Sultan: This season more than 50,000 — I repeat that number: 50,000 — young hockey players across the province are hitting the ice as part of the seventh annual Spirit of 2010 hockey tournament. Last week it was West Vancouver's turn. On Thursday I dropped the puck at the 140-player female peewee-A B.C. Hockey Spirit of 2010 hockey tournament.

The championship game featured the Surrey Falcons and the North Shore Avalanche. Final score was 6-1. I regret to inform my Surrey colleagues that their team was out shot 39-18 and lost. This is the third year in a row the North Shore Avalanche has won the provincial title.

The Spirit of 2010 hockey tournament is a provincewide celebration of amateur sport, healthy living and community spirit. Last year it involved 224 tournaments and teams from 98 communities right across British Columbia, all getting involved in our 2010 Olympic quest.

I'd like the House to recognize the tournament sponsors: the Vancouver Canucks, B.C. Hockey, 2010 Legacies Now and the province of British Columbia, which contributed pucks, jerseys and banners. Great thanks to conference coordinator Cheryl Currie.

Finally, we should especially acknowledge the remarkably skilled young athletes on both teams for a fast-paced, well-played game, and two athletes in particular, Ashley Jukich and Alizah Kerr, each of whom scored two unassisted goals.

ESQUIMALT MILITARY FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRE

M. Karagianis: It's a pleasure to stand in the House today and talk about a significant new addition to my community. Next week the Esquimalt Military Family Resource Centre officially opens in the historic Lampson Street School, which was closed to students in June of 2007. My community fought long and hard to keep the school open, and I was very proud to stand with them. But alas, our voices were not heard by the government, and the school was closed, a victim of the funding formula.

Now, out of that tragedy for Esquimalt, comes renewal, as it always does in my resilient, hard-working community. The Esquimalt Military Family Resource Centre is breathing new life into the grand old building, with

services that include 24 new day care spaces for members of the CFB Esquimalt military community.

[1350]

Like its other locations in my constituency, the Lampson School centre will offer a warm place of welcome and support for military families. As a one-stop source for information and referrals to base and civilian resources, the non-profit centre's trained staff and volunteers help connect military families with the resources they need.

There are a wide range of support services including deployment support, short-term intervention and crisis support, child care programs and a support system for families with special needs and responsibilities.

The new centre is having an open house next Tuesday, March 31, from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. I will be happy to join my neighbours in celebrating that great renewal in the community.

I hope members of this House will join me in thanking the Esquimalt Military Family Resource Centre's enormously dedicated staff and volunteers, who generously donate their time to help others. They are the heart and soul of the centre, living up to their motto "Providing the strength behind the uniform."

DEASE LAKE ARENA

D. MacKay: A week ago on Sunday I left Smithers and drove to Dease Lake, spent an evening there and then continued on to Atlin. I want to give you some idea about the distance between Smithers and Atlin. A round trip from Smithers to Atlin is 2,600 kilometres. If you got in an automobile and left Vancouver and drove for 2,600 kilometres, you'd be in Kenora, Ontario.

The roads were much like a bobsled run. The snowbanks were 12 feet high. I saw several moose and a couple of caribou. It was a great trip. But it's the trip to Dease Lake that I would like to spend a few minutes to talk about.

The purpose of that trip was to deliver a good-news story to the residents of that remote community on Highway 37 North. Over the years the local residents built an arena that would make many communities proud. It was built with money raised from raffle tickets for such items as snowmobiles and quads. It took a lot of tickets to get to the point where they're at now.

As in the case of many communities, a few people got tired, and the arena was never quite finished on the inside. They didn't have a concrete floor — no boards, no Plexiglas and no ice plant for their arena. After a great deal of arm twisting, I was able to deliver a cheque in the form of a grant to that community for \$400,000 to permit them to complete their project.

The local residents turned out in great numbers, and the event was one of the most inspiring events I have attended over the past eight years. It was a privilege to have been able to deliver on an issue that I heard about

over the years.

This community and the arena will be a showcase for the many small communities that are in close proximity. Who knows? I may even get an invitation to play hockey against or with the kids, because I don't think I can compete with those teenagers up there.

HEART TRUTH SOUTH ASIAN FASHION GALA

S. Hammell: Hon. Speaker, 400 attendees turned out for an evening of fashion, food and philanthropy at the inaugural Heart Truth South Asian Fashion Gala in Surrey. The Heart Truth South Asian Fashion Gala was a first-of-its-kind event aimed at raising awareness of the risk of heart disease and stroke among South Asian women. It is part of a national campaign by the Heart and Stroke Foundation to raise awareness and provide women with the tools they need to reduce their risks and protect themselves.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation is a volunteer-based health charity focused on eliminating heart disease and stroke and reducing their impact through the advancement of research and the promotion of healthy living.

Fashions were provided by the Surrey-based shop Made in India and were modelled by celebrities and dignitaries such as former MuchMusic veejay Monika Deol and our Minister of Healthy Living and Sport. I also had an opportunity to put on a beautiful sari and walk the catwalk — and for such a great cause.

The event raised \$104,000 for the Heart and Stroke Foundation of B.C. and Yukon, half of which came from a single donation. After being moved by the speakers and performers at the stylish event, Irwin Singh Brach and Satinder Singh Dhillon were inspired to match the \$52,000 raised by the gala with their own donation of \$52,000.

I'd like to congratulate all the people who participated and the people who organized an event over such an important issue as heart and stroke.

[1355]

AMATEUR SPORTS IN PRINCE GEORGE AND GAMESTOWN 2010 CHALLENGE

J. Rustad: Just last weekend the Prince George Minor Football Association and northern B.C. high school football hosted the 2009 Northern Football Combine at the Northern Sport Centre in Prince George. It's an annual three-day camp where more than 100 varsity and junior varsity players come to work on improving their skills, learning firsthand the opportunities available to them to pursue football after they graduate from high school.

With more than 700 players playing minor hockey and high school football in northern B.C., this is always a popular event. I believe it's the kind of event that will

make Prince George one of the frontrunners to win the province's GamesTown 2010 competition with the \$100,000 grand prize to upgrade a healthy living or sports facility, a number of tickets to the 2010 Winter Games and more.

The north is a leader in B.C. when it comes to engagement and involvement in community sports events. The people really embrace the spirit of healthy living and the excitement of hosting the 2010 Winter Games. When I look at the GamesTown 2010 competition and the criteria for winning the title — healthy living spirit, engagement in amateur sports, commitment to environmental sustainability and incorporation of the 2010 Winter Games theme — Prince George will be difficult to beat.

With ongoing and highly successful sports and community events such as last week's northern football combine, I'm confident that the people of Prince George can leverage this success into the title of GamesTown 2010.

Unlike some politicians, I believe that clean, unfettered competition is never a bad thing. With this in mind, I'd like to take this opportunity to challenge all members of the House and all communities in B.C. to visit www.gamestown2010.ca and take the GamesTown 2010 challenge. Let the games begin.

Oral Questions

MEETINGS BETWEEN PATRICK KINSELLA AND GOVERNMENT MINISTERS

C. James: The Premier and the Attorney General — in fact, this entire government — have spent the last few weeks refusing to come clean to the public and be answerable for payments from B.C. Rail to the Premier's closest friend and Liberal campaign chair, Patrick Kinsella.

But those weren't the only dealings that Mr. Kinsella had with this government. Records obtained by the opposition and members of the media show that Mr. Kinsella met with the former Solicitor General on February 1, 2006. So my question is to the Premier. Would he tell this House why Mr. Kinsella met with the Solicitor General? What was the meeting about, and who was Mr. Kinsella representing?

Hon. W. Oppal: The Leader of the Opposition knows well that that matter is before the Supreme Court of British Columbia, and I will not comment on it.

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

C. James: It's very clear that there's only one answer from government on that side. They refuse to even listen to the question. They just give the answer no matter

what. "It's before the courts."

I'll repeat again, Mr. Speaker. This issue is about Mr. Kinsella meeting with the Solicitor General. We know Mr. Kinsella met with the former Solicitor General on February 9, 2006, on April 11, 2007, and on May 2, 2007.

Again, my question is to the Premier. There were a lot of meetings between Mr. Kinsella and the former Solicitor General, a lot of meetings for someone who claims they aren't a lobbyist. Will the Premier tell this House what business Mr. Kinsella was doing?

Hon. W. Oppal: The issues involving Mr. Kinsella are before the Supreme Court of British Columbia.

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

C. James: It's unbelievable. It's very clear that this government will do absolutely anything to protect the Premier and his friend — absolutely anything. This is around meetings held with government, meetings held by Mr. Kinsella and government. This government will hide accountability; they'll stonewall. They'll refuse to tell the public what's going on. It's long past time to come clean on Mr. Kinsella's relationship with this government.

[1400]

I'd like to read how Mr. Kinsella himself describes his relationship with this government. "Access to key decision-makers is simply the price of admission in our business." Well, that's certainly true when it comes to the former Solicitor General. Eleven times he met with Mr. Kinsella. He also met with key officials reporting to the Solicitor General.

Again, my question is to the Premier. Does he believe in public accountability or not? Will he stand up today and tell us what kind of business Mr. Kinsella was doing with his government officials?

Hon. W. Oppal: I will not answer the question.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

L. Krog: Frankly, Mr. Speaker, the complete lack of accountability by this government in this chamber today on this issue is shocking. The public is tired of the complete lack of answers. They now suspect strongly that this government has something to hide.

Mr. Kinsella was meeting with a senior minister of this government repeatedly — on February 1, 2006; February 9, 2006; April 11, 2007; May 2, 2007. And it goes on and on. So my question is to the Premier, Mr. Kinsella's friend. What was discussed at these meetings,

and who was Mr. Kinsella representing?

Hon. W. Oppal: If that member has allegations to make, he should make them to the appropriate authorities.

Interjections.

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

L. Krog: I don't know what the Attorney General knows, because he won't answer the questions. The question is very simple. This government is being asked about meetings between a person who's clearly working on behalf of somebody. It's not before the courts, unless the Attorney General knows something that this House doesn't know.

It's very, very simple. My question is to the Premier. What were Mr. Kinsella and the government meeting about, and who was Mr. Kinsella representing?

Hon. W. Oppal: I have no knowledge of whatever meetings took place, if they took place. If there is any wrongdoing associated with whatever took place, then that member ought to take it to the appropriate authorities.

R. Fleming: The Attorney General is going to have to do better than that, because this government has a responsibility to make sure the law is followed.

The fact that unregistered lobbyists are plying their trade and working the back rooms of government, that their friends seem to walk around this place and have a meeting with whomever they want, whenever they want isn't good enough.

Again to the Solicitor General: who was Mr. Kinsella meeting with, when did these meetings occur, and who was Mr. Kinsella representing? That's a fair question for this government to answer. They're obligated to answer it, and they should tell British Columbians exactly that.

Hon. W. Oppal: If there are any allegations of wrongdoing concerning any meetings, then that member should ask the appropriate person — Mr. Kinsella. I have no knowledge of any meetings that took place, and if there....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Attorney, continue.

Hon. W. Oppal: If there is any improper conduct on the part of any person, then the member opposite should lodge that with the proper authorities.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.
[1405]

R. Fleming: The supplemental is the question that we want an answer to, which is why the Premier's friend has been repeatedly meeting with members of the executive branch of this government and who he was representing when he met with them. That's the question.

The Attorney General suggested that this matter is before the courts. I don't know what he's talking about. He has an obligation to disclose what exactly this unregistered lobbyist was meeting with senior members of the cabinet about, and he should do it today.

Hon. W. Oppal: If there is someone who is an unregistered lobbyist, there are remedies for that. There are appropriate legal remedies for it, and the person should take it there.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

M. Farnworth: The Attorney General says he doesn't know, and he says: "Go to the appropriate authority." Well, let's do just that. Let's go to the member of this House who knows Mr. Kinsella better than anyone. Let's go to the member of this House who's probably spoken to Patrick Kinsella more than he's spoken to some of his colleagues on that side of the House.

Let's go to the Premier, and let's remind him of the words that he said on CKNW in 2008. "What private citizens do is up to private citizens." But Mr. Kinsella is no ordinary private citizen. He has unfettered access to a government. It shows meeting after meeting after meeting after meeting, and this Attorney General won't answer, so my question is to the Premier.

Premier, you know Mr. Kinsella. You know the access he has. You know that he is no ordinary citizen...

Mr. Speaker: Member.

M. Farnworth: ...so why was he meeting with members of your government on a regular basis? What was he meeting about? Who was he representing, and was he representing himself?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

First of all, I want to remind the member to pose the questions through the Chair.

Hon. W. Oppal: The members of the opposition have linked Mr. Kinsella to the B.C. Rail dispute. That case is clearly before the Supreme Court. I'm not going to

answer the question.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Just wait.
The member has a supplemental.

M. Farnworth: The questions link Mr. Kinsella to the Minister of Environment, the Minister of Forests, the Solicitor General, the Premier on meeting after meeting after meeting, and we want an answer. What was Mr. Kinsella meeting with government for? What was he meeting about, and who was he representing?

The question is to the Premier. Why won't the Premier answer? What is he afraid of? What doesn't he want the public to know about Mr. Kinsella? Why won't he stand up and answer the questions? The public has a right to know.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. W. Oppal: If there was anything improper about any meetings that may have taken place, then the members opposite have an obligation to report that to the appropriate authorities.

N. Macdonald: The gentleman we're talking about, Patrick Kinsella, is a lobbyist. There is nobody that does not think that that is the case. The lobbyist law that the Attorney General talks about is a farce. We know that it is a farce.

[1410]

The questions have been directed to the Premier. He has heard them again and again. Everyone in this House expects the Premier to be able to stand up and defend his government.

Stand up and explain what Mr. Kinsella was doing meeting with one after another of your ministers. Stand in this House, and explain to the people of British Columbia.

Hon. W. Oppal: I'm not here to defend Mr. Kinsella or anyone else.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. W. Oppal: If there has been a violation of the lobbyist act or any other act or statute, then there is an obligation on the part of these members to take that to the appropriate authorities and report the violations.

Mr. Speaker: Member has a supplemental.

N. Macdonald: After four years you get used to an awful lot, but even for someone who has been here and watched day after day what goes on in this House, this is so clearly a disgrace.

The question has gone to the Premier. The Premier has an obligation to answer. There were meetings in 2006, 2007. This is not an ordinary person. He is not only tied to the giveaway of our railway. He is tied to the giveaway of our rivers. He's tied to the expansion of gambling. He's tied to liquor law chaos.

We have a right to know. The public has a right to know what those meetings were about, and the Premier has an obligation to stand up and explain to the people of British Columbia what the nature of those meetings was, what was going on. Why is there lobbying going on at the heart of his government? Stand and explain.

Hon. W. Oppal: You know, the members themselves continually make reference to the B.C. Rail dispute. The member did it again. In those circumstances, it would be improper for me to make any comment at all about anybody's activities.

J. Horgan: My question is to the Premier. We're looking for a little bit of openness. We're looking for a little bit of accountability. The Premier's campaign manager in 2001 and 2005 has had unfettered access to members of the executive council.

Will the Premier stand in this place and explain to British Columbians why his campaign manager can do anything he wants with anyone he wants, and you won't answer for it?

Hon. W. Oppal: Again, if there was any improper conduct on the part of anyone, then that member should take the opportunity and report the same.

Mr. Speaker: Member has a supplemental.

J. Horgan: Again, to the Premier. February 1, 2006; February 9, 2006; April 11, 2007; May 2, 2007 — on and on and on. Your campaign manager can talk to anyone on that side of the House, and the Premier allegedly, presumably, thinks that's okay. Again, to the Premier. Why can this guy do whatever he wants? Why is he above the law?

Hon. W. Oppal: If there was anything improper done by any person at any time, that member knows that there are remedies that he may seek.

B. Ralston: I'd remind the Attorney General that he has a dual role. That dual role is a very important one constitutionally. He is at once a political member of cabinet, but he has a separate and independent duty

to be the chief law enforcement officer of the province. Sometimes that involves standing up to political members of his cabinet. He's obviously failed to do that here.

My question is to the Premier. Who did Mr. Kinsella meet with on these occasions, on behalf of whom, and what was he paid?

[1415]

Hon. W. Oppal: I understand the dual role. Thank you, sir.

It's the members opposite who have linked Mr. Kinsella to the trial, and that makes it improper for us to comment on.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

B. Ralston: The meetings we're talking about took place in 2006 and 2007, well outside the period spanned by the indictment in the case before the court. So these are not before the court. The minister has an obligation to answer the question.

Hon. W. Oppal: I'm not prepared to accept that member's contention that those incidents took place at that time and that they're not before the court.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

GRAVEL EXTRACTION PROPOSAL AND HOPINGTON AQUIFER

S. Simpson: The Hopington aquifer in Langley is the sole water source for over 3,000 wells in that community. Today people in the community are very concerned about proposals by the Transportation Minister to mine gravel out of Brown's pit, potentially compromising this essential water source. These concerns have been shared by the mayor of the township.

People in the community tell me that they have got no support from their MLA, the Minister of Housing and Social Development, and that they have been bullied and dismissed by the Transportation Minister on these matters.

So my question is to the Minister of Environment. Will he commit today that he will not approve of gravel extraction from Brown's pit and will protect the integrity of the community's drinking water?

Hon. B. Penner: I'll be pleased to investigate this matter and take the question on notice.

Mr. Speaker: Member has a supplemental, but is it a new question? The minister did take it on notice.

S. Simpson: Yeah, different question.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. Proceed.

S. Simpson: Since the Minister of Environment is not aware of this, I'm sure the Minister of Transportation understands this issue. He has an application put forward. The point here is that there is no plan B for these families that depend on the Hopington aquifer for their water. There are numerous other sources for the Minister of Transportation to seek gravel in this province. There is no other choice for people in this community for drinking water.

Gravel extraction creates huge risks around water — the potential for the release of arsenic and other pollutants — and according to a study that was done for his ministry by EBA consulting, the Ministry of Environment has rated the Hopington aquifer's vulnerability for being contaminated from surface sources as very high.

My question is to the Minister of Transportation, who is behind this proposal. Will he do the right thing? Will he withdraw this proposal around the Brown's pit gravel, and will he say to that community: "I'll find my gravel somewhere else. I won't jeopardize your water source. I'm backing off of this proposal"?

Hon. B. Penner: As I've already indicated, I'll look into this matter. Since the member has not seen fit to bring it to my attention before today, I will endeavour to investigate this matter and respond.

HEALTH CARE TRAVEL ASSISTANCE FOR DISABILITY BENEFITS RECIPIENTS

K. Conroy: Jack Ward is a disabled man on income assistance from my constituency who recently had to travel to Vancouver for serious medical services. Imagine his family's shock when he was provided a total of \$12 a day for meals. We all know that purchasing a healthy meal in Vancouver with \$4 is next to impossible.

To the minister responsible for income assistance. How can he possibly defend this policy? How can he expect a person who has no choice but to leave their community for urgent medical care to survive on \$4 per meal, \$12 a day?

[1420]

Hon. R. Coleman: If the member would like to provide me with the details, I'll look into the matter. I'm not familiar with this individual case.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

K. Conroy: In fact, it's a policy that this minister sup-

ports in his ministry. It's a policy of \$12 a day that the ministry is putting forward. It's a ministry policy that is for everybody that travels from rural B.C. to get medical services. They're paid \$12 a day.

All I'm asking is: would this minister please commit to looking at this policy, to say today that people can't survive on \$12 a day for a meal in Vancouver, that they need healthy food when they're coming for medical services? Will he say today that indeed he will look at it, that the policy doesn't work and that he'll commit to changing it?

Hon. R. Coleman: I am more than happy to look into the matter, if the member wants to bring it to my office. She could have brought it to my office at any time with regards to this. I will look into the matter for the member if she wants to bring me the details.

C. Trevena: The question that my colleague has just asked is a matter of policy, and I would like to ask the Minister of Housing and Social Development again whether it's not just looking into a specific case, but does he actually agree with a policy that leaves people with \$12 a day to live on and a policy that leaves people with disabilities...?

I have had one gentleman who has disabilities sending, I would say, about 30 letters to my office saying: "I haven't got the money to live on." Will the minister look at that policy, and will he say: "I agree with it. I think that's a good policy"? Or is he just going to write it off like everything else that this government seems to be doing today?

Hon. R. Coleman: As I said to the member for West Kootenay–Boundary, I will look into the matter.

In addition to that, I want to actually emphasize to the members opposite that the only government that ever has given a raise to people on social assistance in the province of British Columbia in the last 15 years is this government on this side of the House.

You know, Mr. Speaker, when it came time to vote to actually increase the rates and help people on social assistance in the province of British Columbia, they voted against that. They are the same people on the opposite side of this House who would go out tomorrow, if they had the opportunity, and cancel the rent assistance program for families making under \$35,000 a year — 8,000 families in B.C. — because they don't believe in it. They would put those people on the street.

I say that we'll look into the policy. I mean that, but at the same time, there can't be both.... Members over there, you folks have no interest whatsoever in helping people that are underprivileged in the province of British Columbia.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Just take your seat for a second.
Members.
Member has a supplemental.

OMBUDSMAN REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS ON INCOME ASSISTANCE

C. Trevena: I'm not sure what I should interpret from the minister's non-answer, when he clearly doesn't know his own ministerial policies about what is happening in social assistance. I think it's very troubling that the minister has such a lack of understanding, when we've had now a second Ombudsman's report into the way that the system works. That Ombudsman's report basically said the system is broken. It doesn't work.

I would like to ask the minister whether he can plow through the two Ombudsman's reports and maybe the latest one to look at some of the recommendations, particularly on the issue of immediate needs, what used to be emergency needs assessment, where we have people who have nothing, absolutely nothing — no home, living in their cars, living in complete poverty — who are given.... Maybe, if they're lucky, an advocate will give them a tent to live in.

[1425]

I would like to ask the minister whether he will implement the Ombudsman's report immediately to make sure that those needs are addressed immediately, and not with the three-week delay that we're seeing in many areas across this province.

Hon. R. Coleman: Well, there are a number of topics in the one question. I'll try and address them all for the member opposite, but let me start with the first one.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. R. Coleman: Let's start with the first one, and that is the Ombudsman's report. If the member was actually paying attention to me in the last couple of days, we've accepted the report of the Ombudsman. I've actually complimented the Ombudsman on the work she's done with my ministry over the last number of months. We sat down and had a very collaborative process with the Ombudsman with regards to her recommendations. We committed to implement all the recommendations but one.

Then the member went off and talked about people sleeping in their cars. Let me just segue for the member opposite a little bit of information with regards to that. Last Sunday, standing on a lot in Vancouver was the Leader of the Opposition and another MLA from

Vancouver, saying: "These guys are not going to do the memorandums of understanding and build the homelessness for people in the province of British Columbia." That's what they said.

Interjections.

Hon. R. Coleman: Wait for it, Member. Wait for it. So on Tuesday....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. R. Coleman: On Tuesday....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. R. Coleman: So you're standing on an empty lot, sitting in the rain with an umbrella, saying, "They're not going to do this," and on Tuesday the Premier announces \$261 million of capital.

We said we would do the MOUs. We're doing the MOUs. We're doing more for homelessness than anybody in the history of the province of British Columbia, and we'll continue to do that.

[End of question period.]

L. Krogh: I seek leave to table a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Petitions

L. Krogh: I wish to table a petition consisting of 37 signatures from people in my constituency asking the government to reconsider the postponement of the intended in-hospital dialysis ward at the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital.

K. Conroy: I seek leave to present a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

K. Conroy: I have a petition with almost 1,500 signatures from people in the Kelowna and Boundary area opposed to Big White's water licence application. They're calling on the Ministry of the Environment to deny the application and asking for a comprehensive water use management plan for the Kettle River.

J. McGinn: I'd like to seek leave to present a petition on behalf of the B.C. Health Coalition.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

J. McGinn: This petition has over a thousand names of people who are concerned about the protection of public health care in British Columbia and who want this House to affirm the sustainability of public health care in British Columbia.

Orders of the Day

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

Budget Debate (continued)

Mr. Speaker: Before we start, hon. members will be advised that under standing orders, the Chair will be required to put all necessary questions to conclude this debate at 6:15 this evening.

R. Fleming: Before we adjourned at 12 o'clock, in my remarks I was talking about some of the failings of the budget around a research and development agenda and contrasting that with other jurisdictions which have used these extraordinary times of economic crisis that we're in.

[1430]

Jurisdictions like the United States, the United Kingdom and, most recently, Ontario look at this crisis as, in fact, an opportunity to see where the economy is going, to see where the jobs of tomorrow will come from and to look at the difficulties that industries like manufacturing and the automobile sector, in the case of Ontario, will have. They won't come back, necessarily, in the same way.

I think the analogy is very apt for British Columbia, where we have resource-dependent communities across British Columbia that are really in the same boat. We don't anticipate, in many cases, that those sectors of the economy will come back in exactly the same way as they have for decades and decades in terms of how capital is used and how labour is used. That is why we must make those critical investments, and this budget didn't do it.

I think the other thing that's very disappointing — and I want to spend a few of my remaining minutes on this question with regards to advanced education — is what a letdown the budget the government tabled was for students and their families. Low- and middle-income families in British Columbia need the ability, want the ability to access education, to pursue trades and diplomas and degrees and advanced degrees but don't have the means to do it and face barriers to B.C.'s post-secondary educational institutions that are significant.

This is the very same year that the federal government's millennium scholarship disappears. It will wind

down and sunset completely.

This is an extraordinary year, as well, when you look at all of our campuses that have campus-based bursary programs for students with various economic needs. Those funds have been hammered in this market environment. Endowments and bursaries on campuses that support operations in terms of revenue supplements — own-source revenues for universities and colleges — but that also support student aid that is campus-based will be paying out approximately half of what they had before this financial market tsunami hit British Columbia, as well as everywhere else.

It was a time when government should have been listening and should have been helping, under these special circumstances, to ensure that British Columbia's young people, regardless of their background and where they came from and how much money their parents earn, will be supported to pursue their dreams. And it wasn't. In fact, it was worse than that.

Not only did the government not help the institutions with their own bursary programs. They didn't even help the core programs that government operates. I'm referring to StudentAid B.C. In fact, they cut the budget for student financial assistance at a time of great need, at a time when enrolment for post-secondary institutions is projected to increase. That shows total complacency in the face of urgency.

There was no effort in this budget or in budgets previous to get rid of British Columbia's shameful record of having Canada's highest student debt levels or the ranking that British Columbia was awarded just this December by the Millennium Scholarship Foundation, which did a survey of all the provinces and territories in the country and found British Columbia to have the least generous programs for student grants and student supports in the country. We ranked bottom, and we ranked first only seven or eight short years ago in those same rankings.

From first to worst — that's the record of this government on student financial assistance, and this budget made no attempt to attenuate that shameful record. There are no ideas for improvement that were offered in this budget.

These are anxious times. Families are sitting around their kitchen tables. They're talking about falling home values. They're looking at their personal credit issues, their high family debt levels. Those are on everyone's mind.

When they're trying to make a plan to better themselves and make their family safe and secure, when they're trying to look at avenues to pursue skills and diplomas and trade tickets and degrees that our labour market calls for, they look to government for help, and it's not there. In fact, what help there has been is worsening and is being pulled away.

[1435]

There are some other inexcusable features in this budget. At a time when citizens need government in their corner, when they need a government that's fighting to keep jobs, that protects small business and addresses the competitive challenges of our economy.... At a time like this, this budget actually cuts funds that market tourism.

The tourism industry is one of the cleanest and greenest sectors of our economy. It sustains thousands of small businesses — 125,000 direct jobs. It is a significant portion of this province's gross domestic product. It's an industry we would like to do even better at. It's an industry that's facing tough times. Projections for U.S. visitors are down something like 10 percent. That's the challenge that we're facing in this coming year — European visitors as well.

As the throne speech indicated repeatedly, we're inviting the world here for the 2010 games. That takes place in this fiscal year, which this budget covers. And what's happening in this fiscal year to tourism marketing? It's being cut in this budget. Tourism B.C.'s revenues will be cut by \$300,000 this year, \$4.2 million in 2010 and \$5.6 million in the third and final year of this budget that was tabled.

Other jurisdictions are seeing the challenges. They're competing for visitor dollars that we compete for, and they're redoubling their efforts. They're redoubling their efforts, and they're amending their plans so that their industries and the jobs and the small businesses that support tourism don't go into decline. That is something that should have been a feature of this budget, but it wasn't.

I thank you for the time this afternoon to make some remarks on the budget.

Hon. S. Bond: I'm delighted today to be able to stand up in support of Budget 2009, and I think it's also high time that we actually had an opportunity to hear in this Legislature a sense of optimism, despite the very difficult circumstances that British Columbians are facing.

Mr. Speaker, you would well know that British Columbia is not facing those circumstances alone. In fact, every jurisdiction around the world is grappling with the same circumstances. It's important that this government has laid out a very clear path for the future of British Columbia, and we have a very strong record on which to base that.

Before I make my comments and, in particular, address some of the comments made by the member opposite, I want to say what an absolute pleasure it has been for eight years to stand in this Legislature and represent the people of Prince George–Mount Robson. I can honestly tell you that as we face challenging circumstances in northern British Columbia, there is nothing I am more proud of than the fact that the people I represent are resilient, they're hard-working, and despite everything that we've heard in the Legislature

from the members opposite, they are optimistic about the future of British Columbia.

One of the things that makes this job such an incredible pleasure and that ultimately makes it possible is that each one of us has stood in this House to recognize the people who are such an important part of the work that we get to do. We all know that that begins at home. It starts with our families, with those people who care enough to allow us to do the work that's so important to us. They give up a great deal.

So I want to begin my remarks around the budget by saying thank you to an incredible spouse. As the Speaker and someone in the House mentioned the other day, we've just celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary. I'm sure that my husband feels that that is quite an accomplishment. I've always been appreciative of the fact that he is always there. In fact, an important part of the work that I get to do is because I have an incredible family, as members in the House have as well.

Our staff is also incredibly important to us, and I have an amazing team in Prince George that works hard every day to serve our constituents and also a team here in Victoria who are a key part of that.

The ministries that we work in and that we partner with in terms of leadership also. I want today to pay tribute to the incredible public service in British Columbia. As a minister who's had the opportunity to be in three ministries, I can tell you that in every single case, we've had incredible public servants who make a difference, who make a commitment on behalf of British Columbians every single day.

I also want to recognize the leadership that we see in communities across British Columbia. I am so privileged to work with a group of mayors that have been elected by their constituents to serve in small communities in the north.

[1440]

I want today to say thank you to retiring Mayor Colin Kinsley and current Mayor Dan Rogers in Prince George, Mayor Mike Frazier in McBride, retiring Mayor Townsend and new Mayor Bob Smith for the incredible partnership that they have brought to the relationship that I have working in the riding of Prince George–Mount Robson.

As we move forward, one of the things that we have tried very hard to do over the last number of years is position British Columbia to be restored to the place that it deserves in this country in terms of the leadership that it provides and the fiscal certainty it provides for families in this province.

The member opposite, who spoke previous to me, continued to use the word "fiction" and talked about the budget and the fiction that it represents. Well, today I feel incredibly obligated to point out that in fact, the fiction that has been completely ignored in the member opposite's comments really relates to what happened

during the 1990s.

We've continued to hear speaker after speaker on the other side talk about this budget and look at it from a very negative perspective. Well, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you this. In the 1990s the members opposite had an opportunity to position British Columbia, with all of the circumstances that they faced, in a very positive way. Yet what did we see happen during that period of time? In fact, the previous government brought in eight consecutive deficit budgets, including two that have been fondly labelled with a not very pleasant term, and they managed to double British Columbia's debt between 1990 and 2000.

When we talk about fiscal management, we saw the government of the 1990s actually have five debt management plans in place in eight years. They did not meet one single one of them and missed every single budget forecast during their term. I can tell you that this government has a record of strong fiscal management, which changed British Columbia's outlook and is one of the reasons that, as we look at jurisdictions around the world, especially in this country, people know that British Columbia is better positioned to manage through these difficult circumstances than virtually any other jurisdiction.

Why is that possible? It's because we have a record of responsible fiscal management, and Budget 2009 builds on that record. When we became government, we were facing a \$4.4 billion deficit, and what we did was actually implement a strategy to revitalize the B.C. economy.

Interjection.

Hon. S. Bond: I know one of the members chuckles on the other side of the House. That is simply the fact. What this government did was work extraordinarily hard.

Let's just look at our record of fiscal management. We'd be delighted on this side of the Legislature to put that up against the decade of decline in the 1990s any single day, and we'll be doing that very shortly.

We actually reduced provincial operating debt from \$15.7 billion to \$6.4 billion, a reduction of more than 50 percent. In 2004-2005 this government paid the debt down by \$1.9 billion, the largest paydown of debt in British Columbia history. All of those facts have conveniently been left out of any of the comments of the members opposite.

The government of today has also introduced five consecutive balanced budgets, and Budget 2009 outlines a plan to return to a balanced budget by 2011-2012.

We recognize that British Columbia is facing unprecedented circumstances, and one of the most difficult things that this government had to consider was the possibility of returning to a deficit. But we've done that in a very thoughtful and careful way. In fact, British Columbia will

be in a deficit position for two years, but by legislation, we will return to a balanced budget in the third year. We will then reduce the operating debt with all surplus funds that are a result after that.

These are very difficult times, and what people in British Columbia today are looking for is responsible leaders that actually have a thoughtful fiscal plan in place to manage in unprecedented fiscal times. That's exactly what Budget 2009 does. While members opposite voted in favour of the legislation that would actually see us have a two-year deficit and then return to a balanced budget in the third year, speaker after speaker has gotten up and spoken about how inappropriate that was.

[1445]

Well, it's time for the members opposite to stand up and actually tell British Columbians what exactly they plan to do over the next number of years, because we've heard clearly that they're not prepared to lay out a three-year budget strategy. In fact, British Columbians will only hear about a single year's budget plan.

Day after day we continue to hear: "Let's add a billion here, and let's add a billion there. Let's fund this, and let's take care of that." There's only one of two ways we can see that being accomplished by the members opposite. They can ramp up the deficit to such a place that it is impossible for it to be retired within two years, or they can raise taxes. Heaven knows that we've seen that practice occur with the members opposite.

This government has had a strategy in place and has consistently looked at tax reductions over the last eight years, so we find ourselves in the place today of actually having the lowest provincial income taxes in the country for anyone who earns up to \$116,000.

That works for the economy of British Columbia, and that's why we're in the position today to be able to say that yes, in difficult times we need to manage properly, and yes, we are facing a deficit for the next two years. But we have positioned British Columbia well because of thoughtful management, responsible fiscal management in British Columbia, and that's what our budget lays out.

When we look at how we've helped northern British Columbia, obviously that matters a great deal to me. That's the part of the province I represent. In fact, I've lived there my whole life. So it matters to me that at a time when things are difficult in this province, we give smaller northern rural communities the tools necessary for them to actually be able to move forward, to visualize and to realize the dreams they have for themselves and for their families.

As I've watched over the last eight years, investment after investment.... I can speak most personally about Prince George and Dunster and Valemount and McBride and about Dome Creek and places like that in the riding I represent. We've made a consistent and significant accomplishment in terms of adding to the infra-

structure of those small communities.

When I represent a community like McBride, with a very small population, or Valemount.... One of the big challenges that those communities face is that they have a very small tax base. When you look at the kind of infrastructure investment that we might take for granted, or that large communities might, these communities need those tools that help them do the things that are important to them.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, that as I have represented, as I've said, villages like McBride and Valemount.... Just this past weekend, because of an extraordinary partnership with the federal government....

I want to say on the record what a pleasure it's been for me to work with my federal colleagues, the MPs who represent the area of the province that I live in: MP Dick Harris, MP Jay Hill and MP Cathy McLeod. All of those federal partners are working together with us, plus our municipalities and our regional districts, in a time of unprecedented partnership. That's what difficult times call for.

Just in this past week I have been delighted, with my colleagues and through our partnership, to deliver invaluable infrastructure programs to McBride, where we're going to be able to look at things like water metering and upgrading their water system. The same thing in the village of Valemount, where downtown revitalization is in fact critical to this small community. There is no way they could have done it on their own, because of their small tax base.

Year after year — listening to those small communities and working in partnership with our federal colleagues, with our municipal colleagues and with our regional district leaders — we've been able to deliver all of those benefits to assist those small communities in doing the things that you and I, Mr. Speaker, might take for granted.

We have a consistent and strategic approach to how we're going to manage British Columbia through the next number of years. That's what British Columbians want to hear. They want to hear about people who are willing to work together, to work with our federal partners in order to protect and enhance those vital services in northern B.C.

Budget 2009 also does something else that I think is extremely positive for northern British Columbia, and that's the creation of the rural B.C. secretariat. We know how important it is — I live there; I've lived there my whole life — to listen to those voices outside of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

I love being able to visit the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, and I'm happy to serve here in Victoria, but I am most passionate about what matters to northern British Columbia.

[1450]

In fact, we look at all the regions across our prov-

ince — like the Okanagan, Mr. Speaker, where you find your residence. We see how important it is to hear those voices and recognize the progress that's been made in those parts of the province as well.

The rural B.C. secretariat will allow us to further enhance our relationships, to look at partnering with organizations like IPG in Prince George, like the Northern Development Initiative Trust. All of those things are tools that we've provided to people in rural British Columbia.

People where I live don't want government to do things for them. They want it to support the dreams and the goals that those communities have, and that's exactly the strategy that we've put in place.

I was very proud that we were able to host a Northern Opportunities summit in Prince George. What was most significant about that was the attitude of all of the people who attended that summit.

You know, if you'd listened to the members opposite, you would have thought that people would have walked into that opportunities summit with their heads down and negative and wondering where in the world they were going to go and what they were going to do. That's exactly what the members opposite would have assumed.

Well, I can tell you that over 600 people gathered together in Prince George for two days, and they weren't at all deterred. In fact, they were determined to make sure that at this time we are looking at opportunities.

We're finding ways to look to the future of northern British Columbia. There was optimism, there was energy, and there was enthusiasm. This side of the House is committed to partnering, to capturing that sense of enthusiasm and to working closely with the people in northern British Columbia.

When we look at what's so critical at times like these, we certainly recognize that we're going through absolutely unprecedented challenge in the forest sector, for example. We know that as we work in the forest sector and work with our partners, we have to make sure that we are looking at a new forest industry, as it obviously will continue to do those things that are traditional.

But we also have to look at new opportunities. We're very excited about some of the things that we are looking at with bioenergy and biofuel and biomass and even biocarbon. I can tell you that those are words that may not have been in our vocabulary over the last decade, but they are today. Those are the kinds of things and the kind of thinking that will help us emerge from the challenges that we're facing.

There's another key word, and that word is "diversification." One of the things we need to be doing is continuing to help diversify our economy in northern British Columbia. I want to talk just for a minute about something that has done an extraordinary job of doing that. In fact, it's called an airport expansion.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

People might wonder why in the world we care about expanding airport runways across northern British Columbia, and across our province, in fact. Well, I'm very proud to tell you that we in Prince George are now — thanks to a partnership with the Northern Development Initiatives Trust, the federal government and the provincial government — home to the third-longest runway in the country.

That is a very long runway. In fact, it's so long that we've been told that in an emergency we could actually land the space shuttle in Prince George if that were necessary. That's not why we expanded the runway. I think that's an interesting side benefit.

We expanded the runway in Prince George for a very specific reason — because we need to use that runway as a catalyst for the further development and strengthening of our economy in northern British Columbia. It means that we in the north can actually look at the possibility of attracting cargo planes, those big planes that currently.... In Prince George right now they're flying right overhead. They have a flight path that leads right over the top of Prince George as they fly on to Anchorage, Alaska. Well, we know this.

We now have a runway, and we now have a responsibility to capitalize on that tool we've been given in northern British Columbia.

It also allows us to talk about the tourism industry. In fact, if we were able to bring those large charter aircraft.... If people from Asia or Germany and all of those countries want to travel and land in Prince George, we want them to be able to do that.

I am very proud of the fact that one of the most significant investments as a government that we have looked at over the last eight years is transportation infrastructure, including expanding regional airports right across British Columbia. It's important because it helps us diversify our economy. It's one of the tools that we've given to communities to actually help them manage their way through very, very difficult circumstances.

[1455]

Perhaps even more importantly than that, we are committed to and focused on one thing on this side of the House, and that is that we want to make sure we keep British Columbians working. We know that every single job counts.

As recently as this week, as we were meeting in small communities across my riding, in particular, we were able to deliver an infrastructure grant to look at things like water and sewer and all those things that are so basic. One of the reasons we celebrated that in those communities was because there was another great-news story. That was the fact that it meant jobs — two jobs here, three jobs there, five jobs there, 16 jobs here. Every single job counts in British Columbia today.

In fact, over the next number of years this government has committed to investing in \$14 billion of infrastructure investment in every part of British Columbia. While that's important in and of itself, what's even more important is that that will result in up to 88,000 jobs being created right across the province of British Columbia. That is the kind of fiscal management and leadership that this government has put in place and that we expect to continue over the next number of years.

I also want to take just a moment.... I would love to speak the entire time about the north and the amazing things that we've done there, but I also want to, for the record, talk a little bit about what we've done in terms of education. It's absolutely amazing to me. I sat and listened respectfully to the member opposite, who spoke about post-secondary education, something I know that he, indeed, is very concerned about. I do appreciate that, but the facts speak for themselves.

When you look at Budget 2009, the budget maintains funding for kindergarten-to-grade-12 education. In fact, it results in per-student funding of \$8,242 per student, the highest level in British Columbia's history. That's the fact, and it's pretty hard to imagine how one could dispute that.

Even more significantly, the post-secondary education system will see an increase of \$282 million over three years in post-secondary education spending. One of the reasons that this government made the very difficult decision to actually look and consider a deficit budget was to protect those vital services in K-to-12 education, post-secondary education, health care and those important services for children and families.

You know, I would challenge the members opposite. It's time for them to stand up and actually tell us, and tell British Columbians, more importantly. If this isn't what their plan would be, then just let us know. Just tell British Columbians how many more billions of dollars the members opposite expect to invest.

Instead of simply being negative, pessimistic and having very little positive to say, it's time to actually lay out for British Columbians, just like the government has in their plan, what the plan is. Where are the investments going to be? Is it going to be a deficit that is absolutely unmanageable, which will be passed on to generations in this province, or will it be tax increases that will fund all of the things that we've heard spoken about day after day after day on the other side of the House?

Our goal was to make sure that we made education funding and post-secondary education funding a priority.

Another convenient fact completely left out on a regular basis. British Columbia's education system is different today. In the system we have 53,000 fewer children attending public education in British Columbia — 53,000 fewer children. At the same time, this government has decided for eight years consecutively to add

dollars to the education system. If that doesn't speak volumes about a commitment to an education system, I'm not sure what does.

[1500]

Rather than simply hearing the comments on a regular basis from the other side of the House, I think it's time they actually stood up and laid out their education plan and explained to taxpayers in British Columbia exactly what it's going to cost them to meet all of the promises and commitments made by the Leader of the Opposition and by random members of the opposition as they're out and about. We continue to hear: "Let's add here; let's add there; let's add this." Well then, you know what? Let's cost that for British Columbians.

Let's stand up and boldly say to British Columbia: "Here's your choice. You can choose to raise taxes and have a deficit that is absolutely unable to be dealt with in two years." Why don't we simply have that plan laid out for us? Certainly we've laid out our plan in Budget 2009, and in very difficult circumstances we've said this: "Our priorities are health care, education, making sure we have those vital public services for children and their families."

We've actually seen an increase in education funding of over a billion dollars since we took office, and that's simply on the K-to-12 side. How in the world anyone could describe that as a cut is beyond me.

When you think about health care funding in British Columbia.... Over the next three years we're actually going to see health care funding increase by over \$4 billion in British Columbia. Once again, NDP math would call that a cut. That is simply irresponsible. We absolutely need to lay out the facts for British Columbians. It's time for the members opposite to stand up and talk to British Columbians about how they're going to proceed over the next number of years.

I want to take a moment to reflect on the incredible education system we do have in British Columbia. I have been so honoured to travel across the province and virtually visit just about every school district in British Columbia. On those visits I've had the pleasure of meeting with parents, with student, with trustees, with teachers, with support staff workers.

I can assure you of this, and I know both sides of the House would agree with this. The people who work in public education and in education today are absolutely extraordinary. They do an amazing job in classrooms, and there's nothing I like more than being in a classroom watching the magic that takes place between a great teacher and the students that are in that classroom. It is an amazing privilege, and I have been in hundreds of classrooms and schools across the province and feel so thankful that I've had that opportunity.

But I do want to remind British Columbians that over the last number of years we have seen increases in our student achievement rates. Again, as we continue to talk

about the resource side, it's important to talk about the outcome side as well. In fact, we've seen our completion rate increase from 76 percent. We've seen that move up to 79 percent because of the hard work and dedication of teachers and school district administrators working together.

We've also seen our aboriginal rate of completion increase, but we have significant challenges there. We still have a system, basically, that doesn't work for aboriginal children in our province. We know that we have much more work to do when we look at how we're going to help those young students in British Columbia be more successful.

But we've also invested — and again, this budget continues to invest — in early learning programs in British Columbia. One of the things I'm hoping is that members of the House have taken the opportunity to visit a StrongStart B.C. centre somewhere in their community.

Those programs are allowing and encouraging families to bring their young children to schools that have space in them, and in fact, we're seeing incredible results. We're, first of all, seeing a great deal of demand, and that's why it's important that the funding continues to be provided in Budget 2009. In 2009 StrongStart B.C. programs mean that about 40,000 children will be better prepared to enter kindergarten.

We know that if we're going to make those kinds of investments and look at the prevention side in education, we need to start by making those investments early on. That's exactly what we've done. We've invested \$43 million for StrongStart centres in the province, and in fact, today we have 190 StrongStart B.C. centres operating in 102 communities right across British Columbia. So again, an important outcome of the investment that we've made in education in the province.

Today we also want to talk a little bit about literacy and how much that matters in the province, and I know that one might think: "Why in the world are we talking about literacy?" It is absolutely essential to have a literate British Columbia, and it will remain an important priority for British Columbians.

[1505]

As I conclude my remarks, I want to simply say that it is my pleasure today to be part of a government that has recognized the importance of strong leadership, of focusing on job creation in British Columbia, of supporting the rural communities that I represent in this province.

We have unprecedented economic times in front of us. I'm proud of the fact that we've laid out Budget 2009 with a thoughtful and strategic plan that will help create certainty for families in this province. I know that while there may be different views in this House, there's only one view that matters in British Columbia. It matters that children and families are protected, that jobs are created and restored in this province.

I can assure you that I will stand proudly supporting Budget 2009, recognizing that while all of us are facing challenges around the world, this provides a strong, sustainable future for the province that I love very much and for the northern part of the province, which I am deeply honoured to represent.

D. Thorne: Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity today to respond to the 2009 budget on behalf of my 51,000 constituents in Coquitlam-Maillardville.

First, I would like to thank my husband, Neil Edmundson, and my sons Jay and Lee for putting up with me throughout my political career. It seems like a good time to do that. I also wanted to thank my constituency and my legislative staff for their great work on behalf of my constituents. These people have supported me for four years, and I appreciate everything they have done, and I just wanted to say a public thank-you.

Coquitlam-Maillardville is located in the north-east sector of Metro Vancouver, about 15 miles east of Vancouver. Coquitlam was founded by millworkers from Quebec, who settled on the Fraser River in the area called Maillardville.

The francophone community of Maillardville is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year with a lineup of special events, including the annual Festival du Bois, which is the largest French Canadian event in western Canada.

I'd like to take a moment to pay tribute to Antonio Paré, a Maillardville leader and outstanding Coquitlam resident who died last July. Tony was the well-known and much-loved town crier of Coquitlam and is sorely missed by all. He was appointed a freeman of the city of Coquitlam, the city's highest honour, in recognition of his outstanding contributions towards documenting the history and promoting the awareness of French Canadian culture in Coquitlam.

Coquitlam-Maillardville is a diverse community of people who speak an astounding 52 languages, with almost 37 percent able to speak one of the Chinese dialects. Our Asian population has doubled during the last ten years, bringing to our community a rich culture of food, music, art and, of course, many new businesses.

I am currently working with a group of Tri-City parents who want Mandarin to be taught in the school district. They are in communication with local school trustees and staff while they meet regularly to plan their campaign and inform the public of the benefits of this language instruction.

On North Road, the boundary between Coquitlam and Burnaby, there is a vibrant Korean business area, which is in the process of forming a business improvement association. I look forward to working with them to enhance their commercial opportunities when this association is complete.

What many people may not realize about the Tri-

Cities is that it is the fourth most popular destination in B.C. for government-sponsored refugees. We have experienced considerable growth in both the Afghan and Iranian refugee populations, and plans are underway at the moment to assist almost 1,000 refugees arriving from Bhutan later this year.

It is fitting to acknowledge at this time the fine work of SUCCESS, an organization which you are all familiar with. SUCCESS continues to provide a range of services in the Tri-Cities for new immigrants and English-as-a-second-language clients, including resettlement, language training, family and youth services, group and community services.

While groups like SUCCESS do their best to help newcomers to our province to adjust to a new culture, many British Columbians are struggling to adjust to new economic realities.

Housing is only one of the areas in which government action is lacking. People throughout the province are still struggling to make ends meet. Seniors are still waiting for long-term care beds. Too many students still can't afford a post-secondary education because of the combination of rising tuition fees and high living costs.

[1510]

Thousands of people are still being shortchanged by minimum-wage jobs in one of the last provinces in Canada to deal with raising this rate.

Unacceptable poverty rates among children, lack of day care spaces, a rising population of homeless and a lack of services for vulnerable citizens should not be inevitable, even in an economic climate such as we are experiencing now throughout North America, B.C. and the world. They are also the result of bad policy choices that can be fixed.

Residents of Coquitlam-Maillardville were looking to the government's budget for solutions that would improve their daily quality of life. Unfortunately, once again, they have been disappointed. It appears the government's priorities are more along the lines of a \$400 million retractable roof for B.C. Place and hundreds of millions more in Olympic cost overruns.

While Coquitlam residents are facing a significant property tax increase, the budget reduces provincial transfers to communities by 24 percent. Environmental protection in Coquitlam will be compromised by an 11 percent cut to the Ministry of Environment budget, and a 46 percent cut to Tourism does not bode well for businesses in my community that are already experiencing a dramatic reduction in visitors.

My constituency office has heard from dozens of people with other concerns that are not addressed in this budget. One of the most pressing local issues is the possible sale of the Riverview Hospital lands and its redevelopment as a huge market housing site. When the Minister of Housing was forced to admit in 2007 that these plans were being researched by ministry staff, a

wave of concern swept through Coquitlam and the rest of the province.

Madam Speaker, a petition opposing the sale of the lands was immediately launched, and more than 12,000 signatures were collected and presented in the Legislature. People have continued to sign this petition every day, and I will be tabling almost 2,000 more before the end of this session.

In addition, the city of Coquitlam has gone on record as being opposed to the government's plans and to any rezoning of these lands. Even the Tri-Cities Chamber of Commerce has passed a resolution urging this government to give "particular priority to the preservation and enhancement of Riverview Hospital and its existing lands as British Columbia's principal class residential and out-patient mental health care services for people across the province."

Riverview was established in 1904 and has gone from being a hospital that provided care and housing for thousands of patients to a collection of empty and neglected buildings. Currently less than 100 patients reside at Riverview.

I remind everyone that patients released from Riverview have added to the growing number of people with mental illness living in Coquitlam ravines, in abandoned buildings everywhere in the province and in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside streets. This is why the government's proposed plans to sell the property are so shocking and so shortsighted.

People with mental illness and patients should have proper housing and medical care at the Riverview site, and the heritage buildings, gardens and famous arboretum must remain in public hands. Preservation of the lands is extremely important to all of my constituents but particularly the hard-working volunteers of the Burke Mountain Naturalists, the Riverview Horticultural Centre Society and ArtsConnect, who organize the annual Treefest celebrations and walking tours throughout the year on the Riverview Hospital lands.

No one on the government side of the House has publicly announced that the plans to sell and develop the Riverview lands have been cancelled. The silence from the Minister of Housing and in this budget on this subject is ominous.

Residents in my constituency are also watching this budget carefully because of ongoing problems in the delivery of health care in my constituency. The emergency room at the Royal Columbian Hospital is still dangerously overcrowded with long wait times, and all the Minister of Health could offer was the use of a portable trailer to erase congestion — a pathetic offer that was eventually dismissed.

Obviously the Fraser Health region continues to suffer from the loss of St. Mary's Hospital, and yet this government refuses to provide the necessary funds to properly utilize the Eagle Ridge Hospital to its full capacity.

[1515]

Also, Madam Speaker, another issue concerning my residents. In spite of a series of splashy PR events, the Evergreen line — the rapid transit line that we've been hearing about for many, many years — is still a bit of a mirage to most of my constituents, who wonder why so many announcements were made with possible completion so far away.

Development in the Tri-Cities has proceeded as planned, and the postponement of the completion of rapid transit to 2014 has led to an untenable traffic situation. This is unacceptable at a time when we are concerned about the effect that air quality is having on our health and on our environment.

Education funding in the budget falls far short of what is needed both in my constituency and across the province. School district 43, the third largest in British Columbia, is and has always been one of the lowest funded per student in the province for many years now.

Children in my community are also affected by the budget's failure once again to address the serious problems of class size and class composition. I remember when my children were young. We had librarians and art specialists in elementary schools. The number of special education teachers was growing then rather than diminishing, and most classes were considerably smaller.

But just to show that I'm not always negative, I want to remind the House that in 2005 I praised a pilot program for first nations children at Coquitlam's Vanier Elementary School. Unfortunately, my optimism was short-lived. Two years later Vanier School closed its doors, a victim of the latest round of school closures in my constituency. I'm sad to say Vanier School still sits empty today.

Rising post-secondary tuition fees and the cancellation of worthwhile programs because of severe budget cuts have caused enormous problems for my constituents attending Douglas College and Simon Fraser University. A recent rally by students, staff, faculty and community members at SFU highlighted the difficulties arising from this government's continuing reduction in per-student funding.

Transportation, health care, the environment and education are not the only concerns in my community. Violent crime has come to Coquitlam, and a high percentage of the offences are drug-related. No longer a sleepy suburb of Vancouver, shots now ring out in Coquitlam neighbourhoods, leaving fear and shock in their wake. Citizens are voicing concerns about their safety, and families are affected by crime and grieving the loss of loved ones.

The recent government announcement of a supposed crackdown on gang activity turned out to be a hollow public relations exercise with no real funding or commitment behind it. Instead, this budget will impose deep cuts to prosecution, court services and corrections

services.

Even society's most vulnerable citizens, our children, are not immune from this government's budget slashing. The Ministry of Children and Families will be cutting more than 100 staff over the next three years, while as many as 1,300 children wait to be adopted. It is unacceptable that children, who especially need our protection, will be left vulnerable because of this government's misguided priorities.

I'll now focus my remarks back on my constituency, where we are blessed with many active community organizations and involved citizens of all ages and abilities — a special blessing in this economic time and with so many cuts coming up in the next three years.

I want to congratulate the executive and members of the Austin Heights Business Improvement Association for successfully shepherding the first Coquitlam BIA, business improvement association, through the official registration process at city hall.

My husband and I have owned and operated several small — but extremely successful, if I do say so myself — businesses during the past 35 years, so I am really able to appreciate the effort that is required to run a successful small business. By joining together, these merchants in the Austin Heights area will bring so many improvements and increased consumer activity to this area.

[1520]

Like many other cities, Coquitlam is blessed with a number of volunteer community groups who work to enrich the lives of our residents. Among these are the SHARE Family and Community Services Society; the PoCoMo Youth Services Society; the Tri-City Women's Resource Society; the Crossroads Hospice Society; the Como Creek watershed society; the Children of the Streets Society; many, various residents associations; the Tri-Cities Housing Coalition and the homelessness task group; the Royal Canadian Legion; and many more.

To merely say thank you publicly to these wonderful volunteers hardly does justice to their significant community contributions.

I've had the pleasure of speaking and attending meetings of the Rotary Club of Coquitlam. I'm very impressed with their unique funding abilities; likewise, the Burquitlam Lions and the Maillardville Lions, who all do outstanding work in their community through various fundraising efforts.

This Christmas marked the 39th year of the Jimmy Christmas hamper fund, which has provided thousands of food hampers and toys to families in Coquitlam. Started by the Burquitlam Lions Club, the hamper program is another example of numerous individuals and community groups working together to help their neighbours. After many, many years with the Burquitlam Lions, this project is now being passed on to the SHARE Society, who will continue to provide hampers and other essential services to families throughout the Tri-Cities.

Another of the wonderful service clubs in Coquitlam is the Kinsmen and Kinettes. Last June the club members proudly watched as the town centre accessible playground opened. The Kinsmen and Kinettes have a long, long history of community work for children, including the water spray park at Blue Mountain Park, the children's playground and wharves at Como Lake, the tennis courts at Mackin Park and the annual pancake breakfast at Como Lake Fishing Derby. These are all in my riding, and I'm very proud of them all.

I thank the Kinsmen, who have also fundraised to support a search and rescue trailer and equipment for Coquitlam. If that isn't enough, the local club also supports the Boy Scouts, the Dogwood Pavilion for seniors, the Eagle Ridge Hospital, the Little League and the Coquitlam Public Library. And the Kinsmen and Kinettes have a special commitment to cystic fibrosis research.

How do you thank groups who do this kind of work, and how would our society and my community, my constituency, function without these people?

Families in Coquitlam-Maillardville are also involved in a wide variety of sports, from teams of enthusiastic young children to more competitive adult professionals. I was pleased last summer to support the planning of the under 19 World Field Lacrosse Championships, which were held in Coquitlam. Hundreds of athletes from North America and Europe gathered to compete in the ten-day tournament. I've also supported the junior and senior Adanac lacrosse teams in their effort to secure funding to carry out their excellent youth activities.

We have a thriving soccer community in Coquitlam. I continue to join the coaches and parents in their fundraising events, and I look forward to attending their tournaments and games when I have the opportunity.

For some time now I have been working to build a supportive relationship with members of the Kwikwetlem First Nation, a small band that makes its home beside the Coquitlam River in my constituency. A school portable on the Kwikwetlem First Nation reserve was the site of a historic meeting between members of the band and municipal, provincial and federal politicians held in February last year.

"This meeting is not just you learning about us," said band councillor George Chaffee. "It's us learning about you." On the agenda were items that affect the first nation as well as surrounding municipalities, including the Gateway program, TransLink projects and the Coquitlam River salmon enhancement.

The band has worked hard to revive the salmon run in the Coquitlam River. Last September, 15 salmon swam up the Coquitlam River diverter into a trap. They were then placed in a tank, driven up the road and released into the lake behind the Coquitlam dam. This success was a direct result of hard work and determination by band members who are hoping the stream, which has been cut off by the dam since 1905, can be provided with

a permanent fish ladder.

[1525]

Other projects being pursued by the band include a bike rental business offering scenic tours through Colony Farm Regional Park and the salvage of cedar trees to build war canoes. The canoes will be between 50 and 60 feet long, and the cedar removal process and the carving are being filmed in order to pass the information down to future generations. I'm sure the House would join with me in congratulating the Kwikwetlem band for their perseverance. I'm so pleased that they are making progress on so many fronts.

Before I close, I want to talk a bit about my role as opposition critic for Housing and consumer protection. The many challenges facing people seeking affordable and decent housing in this province have not changed in the past year — in fact, hardly in the past four years since I have been in this House.

I hear constantly how affordable housing is virtually non-existent. This government must make an immediate commitment to build non-profit housing and to have a comprehensive housing plan for British Columbia — all of this for low- to medium-income families in British Columbia. There was a time where we were only talking about low-income families needing housing. Over the last year or so, we have come now to where medium-income families have joined that group and also need our help.

In 2001 the government cancelled Homes B.C., a program which had built around a thousand affordable housing units each year. If this program had been maintained, we would not be in such a dire situation today.

In the throne speech the government promised it would be ramping up spending on housing and homelessness, and these words caused a flurry of excitement in Calgary, where almost 700 delegates of the National Housing and Homelessness Conference were gathering on the day the throne speech was delivered.

But when the budget was delivered the following day, it became clear that this was merely hollow rhetoric. In fact, the spending on housing is going to shrink in B.C. over the next few years, even though housing insecurity and homelessness are deep and persistent in the Lower Mainland and many other parts of the province.

From the 2008 revised budget estimates to the budget for 2009 to 2010, total funding for housing has dropped by 15 percent or \$69 million. This cut is actually larger than it appears because women's transition houses and shelters are also now included in the same funding envelope.

Next year's budget for the residential tenancy branch has been cut by \$787,000. The provincial contribution to B.C. Housing has been cut by \$97 million, or 23 percent. This is contrary, totally contrary, to the throne speech commitment to expand "supportive housing." Furthermore, the B.C. Housing service plan shows that funding for non-profit and co-op housing will drop by

\$97.8 million and that funding for public housing will drop by \$13.7 million.

This budget contains virtually no funding for the 12 social housing sites promised by government in November 2007. We're now being told that six housing sites are being considered and should appear any year now, but not the 12 that were promised in 2007 and not when they were needed, which was at least a year or two ago.

The wait-list for social housing still has 10,000 people on it, and the average time on the wait-list is unacceptable. The rental assistance program has provided marginal assistance, but because of the shortage of affordable rental housing, this program has been a huge disappointment to the Minister Responsible for Housing who continues to put his faith in the free market system, which continues to let him down.

Non-profit housing and cooperatives, on the other hand, are partnerships where all involved have an interest in making them work, and they are community assets, long-term investments that benefit everyone. The sooner the members across the way acknowledge this, the sooner we can achieve real improvement in providing affordable housing in British Columbia.

The rates paid to seniors under the SAFER program desperately need to be adjusted to reflect the rental rates of the different regions in this province. My office often hears from seniors who are living hand-to-mouth because their rents are being increased regularly, and SAFER is just not keeping up.

Renters who are fortunate enough to have housing also face many issues with their tenancy. Since 2001 this government has reduced services to tenants and landlords, creating wait times for information and arbitration hearings that are generally unacceptable.

[1530]

This government has also failed to take action on loopholes in the Residential Tenancy Act that often allow legislated annual rent increases to be circumvented. Section 49 of the Residential Tenancy Act, which states that landlords can end a tenancy to do renovations or repairs that require the unit to be vacant, is being used to get rid of tenants in order to increase the rent. Tenants who challenge these evictions often find the process intimidating and inaccessible, and often lose under section 49.

Fortunately, upon appeal to the B.C. Supreme Court, several groups have had their loss overturned, with critical comments provided by the presiding justices. For example, Justice Williamson stated: "The purpose of section 49(6) is not to give landlords a means for evicting tenants." He went on to say that it could surely not have been the intent of the Legislature to provide such a loophole for landlords.

In response to this situation, I introduced a private member's bill in the 2008 spring sitting, which, if supported by the government, would have protected ten-

ants from eviction by renovation.

Based on recent Ontario legislation developed in response to the same issue there, my bill included the right of first refusal and more notice before eviction. It is regrettable that this government's inaction allows tenants to continue to be harassed and threatened with eviction if they don't agree beforehand to exorbitant rent increases.

In May of this past year I visited a number of manufactured home parks in the Interior and the Okanagan, where many homeowners are facing financial ruin, as in other areas of the province. More and more of them are seeing the property that their home sits on being sold for redevelopment.

Changes made to the Manufactured Home Park Tenancy Act by this government did not deal with the real issue of providing full compensation for these homes, and that has enabled park owners to raise pad rentals above the prescribed limits as well. The government ignores the real problem of keeping this land available for affordable housing, whether this is through strata title or cooperative.

In 2007 the then Solicitor General, the member from Chilliwack, publicly ridiculed my private member's bill which called for needed regulation in the home inspection industry. However, it was gratifying for me to see the current Solicitor General begin to recognize the need for the licensing of home inspectors. I'm proud to have initiated this legislation, which should lead to increased consumer protection for prospective homeowners.

But I also have to say today that I'm a bit disappointed that the government did not go all the way and bring in one provincial standard for the education and practical experience that would be required by home inspectors. This would have curtailed what could possibly be, and likely will be, future consumer confusion over standards when they are trying to hire a home inspector.

Consumer protection in the housing industry continues to be lacking teeth in other areas. Presale homebuyers have been waiting for substantial government action for more than two years, while presold developments flounder because of market fluctuations. Changes to FICOM by the Minister of Finance appear to have done nothing to adequately protect presale buyers.

These days the Homeowner Protection Office appears to be doing anything but protecting homeowners. They are pulling back from assisting leaky-condo owners by bringing in policy changes that deny assistance to desperate homeowners. The problem of leaky condos does not look like it's going to disappear anytime soon.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

Recent comments by the Housing Minister finally bring him and his government in line with the 1998 Barrett Commission of Inquiry, which found that the

poorly interpreted building code was partially responsible for the leaky-condo fiasco, as was a lack of provincial monitoring to ensure accurate interpretation of the code. Also troubling to the commission was the fact that the construction industry appeared unaware of how to employ appropriate technology or else "deliberately failed to ensure that construction was of an adequate quality."

[1535]

In a recent response to a *Times Colonist* editorial on leaky condos, the Minister of Housing said that "these problems were not the result of the building code." These problems, I repeat, were not the result of the building code. I'm quoting the Minister of Housing: "They were caused by deficient materials and installation which did not comply with the building code."

If the minister really believes this, then why hasn't he taken steps through the Homeowner Protection Office to regulate builders and ensure consumer protection in the future? A study commissioned by the HPO showed that an overwhelming majority of housing units repaired due to water penetration problems were made of wood.

In view of these findings, the minister's decision to change the building code as of April 6 this year to enable developers to go beyond the current floor limit of four-storey wooden buildings is extremely disturbing. Obviously, the industry's poor record in putting up mid-rise wood buildings leads to the conclusion that this change will result in an increase in the number of leaky condos.

Fire personnel across the country, including the Victoria fire chief, are also very concerned about fire and other safety issues associated with higher wooden buildings and believe the change is being rushed through too quickly.

Thank you for letting me bring forward the views of my constituents today.

Hon. I. Chong: Let me begin my remarks by first of all saying that it's always an honour to rise in this chamber to respond to the budget speech. As I was reflecting back to the first time I entered this chamber in 1996 and counting the number of budgets that I have seen come forward as a result of election years, this would make this particular budget the 16th budget that I have responded to.

Quite a record, I know, but I have to say that in each and every one, there have been issues that needed to be brought up, whether I was in opposition speaking clearly about those things that I disagreed with or whether they were budgets that our government had brought forward that I certainly felt were visionary and leading.

Before I enter into my remarks, though, I think it's incumbent on all of us to take some time to reflect on the fact that we know we have limited time here in these chambers to give thanks to those who have assisted us this past term or in past terms.

I want to begin by thanking the staff in the constituency offices I have in Oak Bay and in Gordon Head — two very capable people, Matt and Maureen, who have been with me for a number of years. I've had others before them, but in this particular term Maureen and Matt have been there each day, ensuring that the access that my constituents have to me or to government programs was always done in a very fair and courteous way.

As well as the fact that we have staff here that support caucus, government caucus.... I certainly understand that in the opposition caucus you have your research staff. You have your communications staff who assist you with your MLA report, your constituency report. Those are very important as well, and they spend a great deal of time putting those together, ensuring that we are able to convey to our constituents the important work we do here.

There are staff who, as well, help me in my minister's office, and I have my assistants who help me with my scheduling and, of course, ensure that they answer the phones in a very polite and courteous way. That would be Katie Reynolds and Linda Carey. Of course, my ministerial staff — my executive assistant Martina Kapac and my ministerial assistant Debbie Smollett, who I rely heavily on, on the matters that come before me in the office — keep my life straight.

There are also staff here who keep this precinct in good and proper running order. They ensure that when we arrive here, the doors are open, and when we leave at night, they're securely locked. That means the security staff as well, making sure that everyone who enters these buildings can do so feeling safe.

[1540]

We want to also acknowledge the pages and the Sergeant-at-Arms, people who work in here. Pages bring us our water, making sure that our every need is taken care of and, as well, deliver the notes that we take back to our office and who deliver to us our computers and other information that we need here.

I know there has been a longstanding history that the pages who serve here come from a school not in my riding but in another riding adjacent to mine, and that is Reynolds School. I know they have sent a number of children here in the past, who have gone on to be very responsible adults. At the beginning of the term usually they're shorter than me, but by the end of the term they've actually grown a foot taller than me. So I know they have learned much while they have been here.

The staff in the dining room, of course, keep us well fed and make sure we can have our food in a timely way. I just wanted to make sure that I took some time to really pay my respects and thanks to all those who allow members of the Legislature to have a somewhat orderly life, whether we're here in the precincts or we're back in our constituencies — especially away from our family.

In responding to this budget, Budget 2009....

Certainly, there'll be no question that I will be supporting Budget 2009. But I want to really highlight what Budget 2009 actually speaks to. It speaks to our government's renewed focus on the economy and on jobs.

For the last number of months we've all been terribly concerned not just for ourselves but for our constituents, for our family members not just here in our own hometown but around the province and around the country, because we have family across the country. I know many of us do — worried about them, worried about their jobs, worried about the sectors they're involved in.

We have a unique privilege as legislators — 79 of us here in British Columbia. After May 12 there'll be 85 of us. I've always said how privileged we are that there are over four million — I believe it's 4.2 or 4.3 million — people in this province, and there are only 79 of these jobs. We, each one of us here, have the honour to have one of those 79 jobs.

So we have a distinct role to play. We are able to pass legislation. We are able to act in a way that protects not just our own community but that we can affect other communities in a positive way. In today's economic climate, that is what we need to do. With the economy on everyone's mind today, with the thought of a job loss on everyone's mind not just for themselves but perhaps a family member — a father, a mother, an uncle, a brother, a sister, a child — what we can do as legislators is everything possible to find ways to provide confidence and stability. That's what Budget 2009 does.

It focuses on the economy. It focuses on jobs. If members opposite would just listen and dig deep into this budget, they will see that this stimulus in Budget 2009 — the measures that have been introduced — will and in fact can move British Columbia forward in a way that shows the rest of Canada that we are leading. And we are leading.

Budget 2009 touches on many areas that I am deeply committed to. Many will know that I come from the small business sector. I believe, as I know my colleagues do, that a healthy small business sector is vital. It's vital to the growth of our economy. We also know there are opportunities in the global green economy.

We know, as well, that in order to move forward, trade is important. Canada is a small trading jurisdiction; British Columbia, even smaller. Trade with the rest of Canada, trade with the rest of North America, trade with the rest of the world — in particular, Asia Pacific — is critical if we move forward. Budget 2009 provides that base, that investment in our economic base, which we need so dearly now. As we invest in our province's economic future, what we must also do is adapt. We have to adapt to the rapid changes in the global economy.

[1545]

When I look at the budget and how it was formulated, when I see how the Minister of Finance — with his very professional staff in the ministry, many who have been

there 20 and 25 years — put forward a credible budget, I can say I'm very proud to be part of a government that was able to bring in a budget that speaks to our economy, that speaks to the job creation and that also speaks to ensuring that we maintain a triple-A credit rating as we go forward and to stimulating our economy.

It's about sound fiscal management. It's about long-term investment. Our government is enhancing that stability and providing that opportunity in this province. Budget 2009 helps British Columbia to pursue the opportunities of the future.

As I mentioned earlier, small business is a critical component of our economy. In 2007 all but 2 percent of the businesses in the province were small business — 98 percent. They employed over a million people. So when we develop policies, when we legislate changes, where there are tax measures, and where there is streamlining of regulation and red tape, it is about protecting jobs for those million people.

It is about those small businesses. I've heard members opposite, some of them, say that they've come from a small business background. If they truly did understand small business, they actually would be applauding the various tax changes we've introduced for small businesses.

The 4.5 percent up to the first \$400,000 for small businesses has now gone down to 2½ percent — a 44 percent decrease. Can we expect members opposite to support that? It's hard to know, when they've not supported previous budgets that we've brought forward — previous budgets that had introduced tax relief.

Small businesses that employ people with less than 50 employees account for nearly half the jobs in British Columbia. So there are many small businesses. But we know there are also many small businesses in the smaller communities that employ as few as ten people. We should be proud because we have more small businesses per capita here in British Columbia than any other province, and we've been a national leader in small business growth over the past five years.

In fact, from 2002 to 2007 the growth rate was nearly double the national average. So you have to ask: why is that? Well, it's because our government recognizes the value of a healthy small business sector. Budget 2009 maintains a competitive tax regime for small business. As I've indicated, the 44 percent reduction is substantial. It sends a message. It sends a positive message forward. And if there's one way to send a negative, job-killing, investment-killing message forward, it's for the members opposite to say they don't support that.

That's what I'm hearing, and that causes concern to people in my constituency. That causes concern for people throughout British Columbia. That actually causes concern right across Canada.

The other area of small businesses has to do with provincial sales tax exemptions, and they're another way

that Budget 2009 is helping B.C. businesses. We're waiving the provincial sales tax on energy-efficient products like commercial boilers and devices to reduce idling and improve the aerodynamic performance of highway trucks. We're supporting business in making decisions that are also good for our environment.

We look forward to working in continued partnership with small businesses in British Columbia. As the minister responsible, I'm very proud of the fact that we have a permanent Small Business Roundtable that was established back in 2005, which the MLA from Kelowna-Westside started when he was minister and the now Minister of Community Development continued on with. Now I have the pleasure, as well, of bringing that along.

I've met with the members, and they remain excited to this day — after four years of having meetings and consultations around the province, providing us with recommendations — seeing those recommendations actually implemented. They're very excited because they know there is still work to do to help the small business community. They are ready to roll up their sleeves and work with us, which is what we're asking people around the province to do, to manage through this difficult economic time — to roll up our sleeves and work together in partnership, not to divide the province as members opposite would have us do.

[1550]

I also want to make comments regarding research and innovation, because I heard the member for Victoria-Hillside offer his disparaging remarks. It is really hard, I know, for members opposite to somehow grasp facts. The facts are that since 2001 we have committed \$1.7 billion to research and innovation — a substantial amount, an important amount, an investment that has put British Columbia as one of the top leaders when it comes to funding research and innovation.

This year we'll see even more funding invested in developing technologies for clean energy and biotechnology, in cancer research. You've heard it before. You've heard it from other people that cancer affects so many of us, so many of our friends and families. If you are to develop a cancer, the best place for treatment, the best place for research is here in British Columbia.

That reputation did not happen overnight. That reputation was built on a partnership with our government and the cancer research community. We have supported them in the past, and I know we will continue to support them in the future. It's very discouraging when you hear members opposite fearmonger out there and spread information that is just incorrect.

I'm also excited about the new wood innovation and design centre that will be established in Prince George. We understand what the mountain pine beetle has done to our forests. We know, with the Minister of Forests, that there is a new opportunity that has arisen from that

wood waste. We also know that there are people who want to put their talents, their creativity to work. Where better to establish a wood innovation and design centre than in Prince George?

It will, of course, be affiliated with UNBC, the University of Northern British Columbia, building on that university's strength. It will be promoting new expertise in advanced building systems, engineered wood products and interior wood design, because we all know wood is good. That's why our government has a wood-first policy.

The Premier has worked with other Premiers across the province. He has spoken to the Prime Minister to ensure that we do not forget that our forest industry still has importance and that our forest industry can still provide those products available.

I want to speak about clean energy as well. British Columbia is a global leader in fuel cell, compressed natural gas and hydrogen technologies, and we're well on the way to leading the world in other forms of clean renewable energy. Budget 2009 continues the innovative clean energy fund, the ICE fund, and we're working hard to harness clean, abundant and alternative energy sources like sun and wind. We'll also use forests killed by the mountain pine beetle to transform our forest industry by using that wood to create clean, carbon-neutral bioenergy.

I mentioned trade, and trade is important. That's why our government recognizes that British Columbia must look beyond traditional markets, particularly for our forest products. There are huge potentials in Asia. China is already British Columbia's second-largest trading partner, and in 2007 that trade was worth \$10.8 billion, which is nearly four times what it was in 1998. One of the things that will help it continue to grow is promoting our products and our expertise.

Just as one example, the Shanghai government has formally approved a B.C.-designed roofing system as part of a plan to renovate 10,000 city apartment buildings in the lead-up to World Expo 2010 in Shanghai. That means B.C. wood producers now have access to a market for as many as 10,000 new roofs over the next two years. I know that our Shanghai trade office has been very involved in this project.

You will know, as was announced, that we've opened two new trade offices in China, in Beijing and in Guangzhou. Just the other day I announced that our Bangalore office will be up and running by late summer. Our trade and investment representative has been contracted. These are overseas trade representatives who bring proven, local, on-the-ground connections and expertise that will help B.C. firms, small and large, connect with potential partners.

[1555]

Partnerships — that is what it's about. These partnerships will promote British Columbia as a destination for investment and trade. They will showcase our products,

they will showcase our resources, and they will spread the word that our province is a leader in research and development. In short, they will help us seize our unique advantage as Canada's gateway to the Asia-Pacific.

As well, closer to home we can still work on improving our trade and the trade barriers that we have. You will know that very soon the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement with Alberta will take effect. TILMA grew out of a historic joint cabinet meeting with Alberta several years ago. This agreement is expected to generate 70,000 jobs here after it comes on stream. The sad part is that the members opposite reject it. They're rejecting 70,000 new potential jobs.

Just recently British Columbia hosted the first joint tri-lateral cabinet meeting with Alberta and Saskatchewan. Out of that meeting came an agreement that the three provinces will begin discussions to create a new western economic partnership that will encompass Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. We're one country. We're ten provinces and three territories, but there are opportunities to partner together to build on that framework so that our citizens can benefit. It would sound like the NDP opposition would reject that.

Budget 2009 invests \$14 billion in infrastructure projects that would create tens of thousands of jobs in every part of British Columbia. Again, it sounds as if the NDP opposition are going to reject \$14 billion of infrastructure spending, some 80,000 jobs around the province. I don't understand how they can choose to have their communities not receive that kind of assistance.

I want to share with you, hon. Speaker, what some of the infrastructure and government programs that we've instigated over the number of years have done for my community of Oak Bay–Gordon Head. Both in Saanich, in the Gordon Head part, and in Oak Bay, I have seen those communities take advantage of the LocalMotion grants.

These are providing more accessible walkways, pathways connecting community to community, allowing for people to choose a more friendly way to commute and choose to lead a healthier lifestyle. They have received these dollars, and they have been grateful for them.

I hear members opposite ask where the dollars are in their communities. You know, they have made remarks. They forget that those are application driven. It is up to the municipalities to put those forward. Perhaps if they had a better working relationship with their mayors and councillors, perhaps if they actually asked them what they could do to help advance those projects, then maybe they would see more of them.

I know that I work with my mayors and councils. I know my colleagues work with their mayors and councils. That's why I've seen some of these projects come forward.

We've also seen a number of Spirit Squares developed around the province, and that was to celebrate our 150th.

But the legacy those Spirit Squares leave behind will be that public meeting space which can be used when we celebrate the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Live Site projects have taken place around the province. I can tell you that in Oak Bay, the Oak Bay Lawn Bowling Club was very happy to be a recipient of that. I know — not even in my community — that the member for Malahat–Juan de Fuca and I went out to his community in Sooke. I saw a marine walk that the mayor was very pleased to see proceed and be supported.

You know, even though it's not in my region, I can tell you that I supported that, because as a provincial legislator and a regional MLA I feel it is important that communities have some voice here when their members aren't able to provide that voice.

I've seen a number of other projects go forward in Gordon Head, like the Gordon Head soccer field. Hopefully, we'll have an opening very soon on that. They've been doing fundraising. Lambrick Park, the baseball diamond — they're having a new dugout put in. These are to have youth be more active in the community, and the parents are very grateful that these programs are available to support them.

[1600]

Oak Bay Recreation Centre in my community has also seen some additional work to upgrade that facility. Gordon Head Recreation Centre. Cordova Bay seniors — 55 Plus club, I believe it's called. Again, not in my riding. It's the member for Saanich South. But I've met with them on three or four occasions, and when they came to see me, I said I would do what I could to help advance that project.

So I know that these are the kinds of infrastructure projects that make a difference in the lives of our citizens and the lives of our friends and our neighbours. What we can do as MLAs, as legislators, when we know that there are these government programs, is help advance them along.

There are other projects, too — larger ones — such as the seismic mitigation program that we have for our schools — the \$1.5 billion that is being spent. I know members like to complain about that, but I understand. I understand that they don't accept the fact that we rely on professional engineers who do a thorough review to decide which projects need to be advanced more quickly than others. I'm grateful that they saw that Mount Doug needed a seismic upgrade, which it received.

I'm also glad to see that Monterey School in Oak Bay received that, and Willows School will follow shortly. But I know also that Margaret Jenkins — I think that's in the Victoria–Hillside riding, or it could be Victoria–Beacon Hill — is currently going through its seismic upgrade.

In terms of seniors. In my area I've seen some new senior additions, and the most obvious one is Shannon Oaks on Bee Street that has provided more choice for

seniors who can no longer be on their own in their own home.

Transit has been an important part of greater Victoria's commuting population, and when the Minister of Advanced Education and I were at the Royal Oak Transit Exchange and we saw the improvements made there in a growing part of greater Victoria, that was very welcome to the people in that area.

So what I believe, hon. Speaker, is that it truly is a challenging task to build a provincial budget that provides stability and confidence for businesses and for families in the midst of global economic slowdown, but it can be done. I believe what is most important for British Columbians, which this budget offers, is a sense of optimism.

I actually hear that in my community, yet when you listen to members opposite, you would think that the sky was falling. That's simply not true. Yes, our province has been affected by the world's rapidly changing economy. Yes, our Finance Minister has introduced a deficit budget so that we can protect services to families. But we are better positioned than almost anywhere else in North America to navigate through these very difficult economic times.

Over the past eight years we've taken steps to lay a foundation for a strong and early recovery. This budget ensures we'll be ready to seize opportunities when that recovery begins.

But before I conclude, I want to contrast what I hear from the members opposite to what I know is Budget 2009. The NDP's economic plan would have us turn back the clock on tax relief and tax reductions. They would have us have credit downgrades, as they did in the '90s, as opposed to the upgrades that we have seen, because they have, in fact, voted against every one of the over 100 tax reliefs that we've introduced since 2001.

The NDP plan says they would like more infrastructure spending, yet they voted against all the budgets that provide that spending. The NDP say they want to scrap the carbon tax, but they refuse to give details on their own hidden, more expensive carbon tax. And even with a world economy in crisis, the NDP have failed to explain why they continue to support positions that would devastate our economy.

They want to scrap the softwood lumber agreement; they want to dramatically increase taxes on the oil and gas industry; they want to ban independent clean power projects, losing thousands of jobs; they want to impose a hidden carbon tax at source — policies that would strip literally billions in investment from our economy and destroy thousands of jobs. At a time when we need to build jobs, they're looking to drive those jobs out of British Columbia, just as they did in the '90s.

[1605]

So why do I support our budget? It's an exact contrast to what the NDP want to do. I'm just going to put

on the record a number of large projects that have happened here in greater Victoria, because the member for Victoria-Hillside seems to have forgotten the \$24.5 million investment in Camosun College's Pacific Sport Institute; the University of Victoria's new social science and math building, which received \$37.7 million in funding; the \$66.6 million ocean science and atmospheric science building; \$12 million for UVic's Medical Sciences Building; and \$14.4 million for Our Place development, to help break the cycle of homelessness.

We have, as well, a new patient tower being built at Royal Jubilee Hospital — over \$300 million. There are projects throughout the greater Victoria region, projects that somehow the member for Victoria-Hillside has neglected to mention, projects that enhance the lives and the quality of lives of all of us here.

As my colleagues have indicated, particularly my colleague from Saanich North and the Islands, the NDP should get out more and have a look around. Things are improving. There are things that we can still do, and we will work in partnership with the local governments and with the federal government to make sure British Columbia continues to get its fair share so that we can move forward and that we are to be the leader that everyone expects us to be.

M. Farnworth: It's my pleasure to speak on the budget debate and to follow the member opposite, the minister, who once again continues to mislead the people of this province, mislead....

Interjections.

M. Farnworth: I'll remind the member. "Misleading" is entirely parliamentary. The term "deliberately misleading" is unparliamentary, and it's unfortunate that the member, despite his time here, continues to fail to understand that, despite numerous rulings from the Chair.

The reason I say "misleading" is because they stand up, and they go: "Oh, the opposition voted against this, and they voted against that, and they voted against everything." It's the opposition's job to vote against the budget.

That member who stands up there and rants about it did exactly the same thing when she sat on this side of the House. She voted against West Coast Express. She voted against funding for health care. She voted against cutting taxes to small business. So did the member for Kamloops-North Thompson. They did exactly the same thing on this side of the House — voted against the budget — because that's the opposition's job. That's because it's the opposition's job.

Again, the member for Saanich North and the Islands is yelling out comments that, frankly, are erroneous. He is wrong. But he did his job, when here on the opposi-

tion side, which is to vote against the budget, because it's a confidence issue. It is a confidence issue.

When we examine this budget that's been tabled by this government, we will see why we don't have confidence in what they have put before this House and why we will vote against this particular budget.

I'll explain it from the level of the province but also from the point of view of my constituents and how it fails to address many of the needs of my constituents and why they're not happy with the budget.

So I mean no offence to the member, but I know that I just like to remind them every once in a while that — guess what — there is another point of view. This constant thing of, "Oh, the opposition voted against this," as though it's some sort of terrible thing, is misleading, because that's not how our parliamentary system works.

Hon. K. Krueger: Not on the side of the angels.

M. Farnworth: Well, let's put it this way, hon. Member: you're definitely no angel.

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: I didn't say he was anything else. I just said that he's definitely not an angel.

Deputy Speaker: Member, you have been here long enough to know that your conversation is through the Chair.

M. Farnworth: Yes, and my remarks are always through the Chair. Occasionally they bounce off the wall over there to the Chair, but always through the Chair.

[1610]

Interjections.

M. Farnworth: Well, the Chair is an angel. I don't disagree with that one bit. I'm referring to the member for Kamloops-North Thompson, who I know would be disappointed if I did not respond to his heckles.

Anyway, back to the matter at hand, which is the budget. The government tabled an economic plan which had ten points. Then a couple weeks later it had an additional 14 points, but now whenever the government members talk about it, they go back to ten points. So the four points kind of got lost along the way.

They were going to do something to help British Columbians through the economic challenges that this province and the rest of the country face, which they like to say — well, in fact, it's true — are global in nature.

At the same time, though, they like to say they will take credit for all the positive things that happen. Well, unfortunately, they want to have it both ways, and when you look at this budget, you see that in many ways the

things that occur in this budget are not where the priorities are for the people of British Columbia or for my riding in Port Coquitlam. What concerns us is that in a number of areas the government has failed to recognize some of the serious challenges that face the province and face our communities.

I'd like to talk for a minute in my critic area: public safety. We have an out-of-control gang war in British Columbia right now that has been going on for quite some time. We've seen the number of criminal gangs increase over the last decade from ten to 120. One would have expected, particularly when a government that has held press conferences....

You know, a major press conference about 18 months ago in Surrey, after the terrible events of the Surrey Six, Ed Schellenberg and Chris Mohan. A full court press conference at E division that we were going to do something. Then again, a few months ago, another press conference was held at E division. "We're going to do something, because the shootings haven't stopped."

The throne speech failed to mention public safety. The throne speech failed to mention one word about public safety, and this comes a week after the press conference that the Premier held. One week later, not one word about public safety is in the throne speech about the government's priorities for the coming year. I see the Attorney General making notes, but it's amazing that the previous year, it's in the throne speech. "We're going to do things. We're going to."

You know, we had the sentencing report. That came out this year, finally, months after it being completed, but not one word in the throne speech. Then we awaited the next day the budget, expecting that public safety would be a priority in the budget, because there had been announcements made, and when you look at this budget, you see that it's not recognized in there.

You see that it's not recognized in the budget, and that where the government said, "Oh, we're going to add more prosecutors; we're going to add more resources," the reality is when you look at their plans, there are cuts to prosecutorial services — prosecutorial services that we need to prosecute cases in British Columbia. The resources that should be there aren't there, and it's in the service plan. It's what the government intends to do.

Then yesterday we have the Attorney General meeting and doing a letter of intent with the Attorney General from Baja, and I understand what he's trying to do. I understand, or at least I think I understand, what the government is trying to do. They're trying to show that they're doing something. Yet the government says: "Oh, we're going to send Crown prosecutors down to Mexico."

[1615]

Well, if we're sending Crown prosecutors down to Mexico, as noble as that may be, then what's happening here in British Columbia, particularly when the budget

tabled by this government cuts funding to prosecutorial services over the next three years?

We need all the resources we can get in British Columbia. That's what this budget should reflect: the priority that the public of this province and my constituents in Port Coquitlam place on public safety and the need to combat organized crime. That should be reflected in this budget, and it's not. That is a shame.

The government's response is: "Oh well, we'll take it out of contingencies." All that says is that they did not do their homework during the fall of the budget process to recognize that this was a problem.

It confirms that this government's entire strategy on fighting crime has been based on dealing with crisis, with dealing in trying to control spin, with dealing in coming up with a plan on the back of a napkin, and nothing that speaks to a comprehensive, long-term strategy that's fully resourced and should have been developed over the past year and reflected in this budget. That's not here, and that is a major flaw of this budget.

G. Gentner: Out of touch. Out of touch.

M. Farnworth: As my colleague from Delta North says, it is a government that is out of touch.

During the Treasury Board hearings, the Solicitor General and the Attorney General should have been demanding that these budgets for public safety, prosecutorial services and court services should not be cut, that they should be adequate to deal with the challenge that we're faced with in this province in the Lower Mainland.

It is a failure — the fact that that is not reflected in this budget. Instead, we get the Premier standing up and saying: "Oh, we're going to reallocate." Well, reallocate from where? And the Attorney General knows I'm right. Reallocate from where? Where are we going to reallocate the resources from? Are we going to reallocate them from the ICE unit — the integrated child exploitation unit? Are we going to reallocate them from the integrated sexual predator observation team?

Is that where we're going to reallocate from? Because they're already not operating at what they were intended to when those programs were announced. The staffing levels in those two units are not what was intended when they were announced over a year ago. One was supposed to have 54 people working on it by this particular point in time, going after those who would exploit children over the Internet. That was cut down to 16 and now operates with seven. It was cut to a further seven.

The integrated sexual predator observation team was supposed to have, I believe, 13. It operates with seven. So we can't reallocate from there. We're not able to do what the government intended the program to do in the first place. Do we take from other areas, other important areas around law enforcement? If you talk to police

officers around this province, that's exactly what's going to happen. That is exactly what's going to happen.

One would have expected more in this budget, and it's not there. That's why this budget fails to meet the needs of the people of Port Coquitlam, it fails to meet the needs of the people of the Tri-Cities, and it fails to meet the needs of the people of the province of British Columbia. It's just one of the reasons why I will be standing up to vote against this budget.

Hon. K. Krueger: Not again.

M. Farnworth: My friend from Kamloops–North Thompson says: "Not again." And I agree. I look forward, after May 12, to sitting on that side of the House and voting in favour of budgets.

Hon. K. Krueger: Sweet dreams.

[1620]

M. Farnworth: Well, hon. Member, I guess that's why you switched from Kamloops–North Thompson to the new Kamloops seat being vacated from.... You were so sure of electoral victory that that's why you switched seats.

Hon. K. Krueger: When they tore my riding in half, it broke my heart, Mike.

M. Farnworth: No, no, no. You and I both know the real reason on that, and as I said, that's why you were so sure.

I look forward to being on that side of the House and voting in favour of budgets. But in the meantime, it's this year's budget that we're having to deal with. The budget, as I said, doesn't meet the test of what's required from the perspective of public safety in the province of British Columbia or deal with the issues that we face.

What concerns me is about the lack of resources and the reallocation of resources, which the Premier talks about. It's taking away from other areas. I've mentioned the ones around child Internet exploitation and sexual predators, but what about the prolific offenders? You see police being reallocated from other areas of fighting crime, and that's a real concern.

The issue around prosecutorial services I've touched on. Corrections is another. The government's own service plan calls for cuts for corrections. That's just maintaining.... You know, those are cuts.

At the same time, the ministries have to pay for pay increases. Those pay increases are not reflected in this budget. There's no allowance for the 2½ percent pay increase that public servants get in this budget.

In the public service budget, in the Attorney General's own ministry there's no reflection on the pay increase that sheriffs get. That has to come out of his budget, and

he knows that. And that's more than the 2½ percent. I think that's 6 percent, or in some cases 10 percent. For corrections officers it's 10 percent. That money's not reflected in the Solicitor General's budget. There's no new money for that. That has to be absorbed out of this budget allocation.

It's like that with ministry after ministry after ministry. What that means is it results in cuts in services — cuts in services that people expect and that, at a time of economic uncertainty, we need more than ever. Public safety is one of those key crucial areas. Now, I could go on at length on the public safety aspect in terms of the changes that I think need to be made, but I'm dealing with it from a budgetary perspective.

Let's look at some other areas of this budget that don't meet the needs of my constituents. The government and the Minister of Education ballyhoo much about the need that "we're adding more money to the education system." Technically, that is true. Trouble is it doesn't take into account the pay increase that the government negotiated. It fails to take that into account.

When you talk about what the school boards are now having to do with.... They're having to cut money out of their budgets at a time when the government failed to address the issue of class size, when it has failed to address the issue of special needs, when it has failed to address the issue of class composition. It tries to skate by and says, "Oh, we've added additional money," yet the money doesn't come close to doing what the government was supposed to do in the first place. So the net result is that it fails students; it fails parents; it fails teachers; it fails my community; it fails the people of British Columbia.

As I've said in previous budgets, the Minister of Education brags about: "Oh, we're spending more money than ever before." Duh, it's called inflation. Duh, it's called additional cost pressures.

[1625]

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: There's the textbook version of why. They don't understand that if you have cost pressures around inflation, that if you have cost pressures around pay increases, if you have cost pressures around commitments made to improve the structure, the composition of classrooms and to improve the needs of dealing with children with special needs, then you have to fund them. You have to fund them, and that's what this government seems to have forgotten. They have forgotten that.

Again, that's another area where this budget fails. They've made assumption after assumption after assumption that, since this budget was tabled, has been called into question.

We know that the Economic Advisory Council asked to meet with the Minister of Finance before the budget

was tabled. That meeting never happened. The only reason one can imagine is that government didn't want to know any further how bad things were getting and how long they would be in deficit for. They wanted to be able to say: "Oh absolutely. It will be two years, and then that's it."

Well, they couldn't predict us going into deficit, because they were still saying two weeks prior to the budget: "No deficits in British Columbia." A few weeks before they were saying: "Don't worry. It won't happen here." As the member for Kamloops–North Thompson says: "British Columbia is sailing the ship of state, sailing pretty calmly through some troubled waters."

Hon. K. Krueger: There's much to be thankful for.

M. Farnworth: We do have much to be thankful for. Trouble is it's not the financial forecasting of the government on the other side. It's not for the pearls of wisdom coming from across the other side who, a few weeks before a budget's tabled that shows two years of deficits, are saying that there is nothing to worry about, that that will not happen here in British Columbia.

Yet they're quite happy to stand in here on the eve of an election and say: "Don't worry. We are such great managers. We are so clairvoyant that we will tell you precisely when this recession will end. We will tell you precisely when we will budget back into the black again. We will tell you right down to the very day, the year, the hour, the minute in a budget cycle when British Columbia will go back into the black."

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

They will stand and do that on the eve of an election. When no other jurisdiction in the world is able to do that, this government can stand in this House, table a budget and say: "We know with certainty this is what's going to happen." I think those remarks need to be taken in the context of the timing of an election, and that's exactly what this is about.

It's about the timing of an election and being able to try and somehow pull the wool over the eyes of the people of this province and say: "Don't worry. Be happy. We have it all in hand." And yet, were they to form the government after May 12, we know exactly what would happen. There will be a new budget in the fall, and they will come back and say: "Oh, guess what. Things are a lot worse than we imagined. Those forecasts we had in the spring? Oh, guess what. They're a lot worse. So we're going to have to revise things."

[1630]

They're going to do one of two things. They will either cut the services that they said, "We will protect and save," or they will revise the forecasts and the deficit figures. Either way, they will try and come up with an excuse as

to why their clairvoyance failed.

This budget is about elections. It's not about, I think, what the majority of people want to see, which is a budget that reflects the needs of their communities, the needs of their families, the needs of the province.

I talked about public safety. I talked about education. But I'd like to talk for a minute about some of the other areas. One that comes to mind — and I find it really puzzling — is the Premier's office. You know, I am somewhat perplexed....

J. Horgan: They could fit that many people in there.

M. Farnworth: My colleague from Malahat–Juan de Fuca demonstrates why he is one of the most effective, sharpest, most astute members in this House and summarizes it into a very neat nutshell. That is: how can you fit that many people into the Premier's office?

Back in 2005 the budget of the Premier's office of British Columbia was already, if I am not mistaken — give me a little latitude of a quarter of a point either way — three times the size of the Premier's office in Ontario. The province of Ontario has more than three times the population of British Columbia, yet the Premier's office in B.C. had a budget almost three times the size of that of Ontario.

That really raises some questions. Why on earth does the Premier's office budget need to be bigger in B.C. than in Ontario? Is it a case of Premier's office budget envy? I don't know.

It comes down to: where are we this year? And guess what. They're spending 10 percent more on the Premier's office budget than they were in 2005.

J. Horgan: Restraint.

M. Farnworth: There's no restraint taking place out of the Premier's office when it comes to his budget spending. It's okay to increase the budget for the Premier's office. That's okay according to this government. That's this government's priority.

But heaven forbid that we should fund prosecutorial services in this province adequately to do the job that needs to be done. Somehow this government thinks that it's more important to spend more money on the Premier's office, to increase that, than it is to give a proper increase to the Attorney General's budget, to give a proper increase to the Solicitor General's budget — to ensure that those priorities are addressed.

I know one thing. I know that the people of Port Coquitlam and, I dare say, the people of other ridings in other communities certainly don't believe that the priority spending for this government should be the Premier's office — certainly not increasing staffing, certainly not increasing in monetary things and certainly for not doing whatever it is they're supposed to do.

It would seem to me that if you're to cut back on things, that would be the first place to be. Why not bring the Premier's office budget back down to be more in keeping with a province of our size? It doesn't have to be several times larger than the Premier of Ontario's office budget.

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: Again, my colleague from Malahat-Juan de Fuca points out that at least the people of Ontario know that when they fund the Premier's office budget, they get answers to their questions. But we don't get that here in this House. We don't get that.

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: I fully accept.... I, too, understand the ministerial need to be dealing with ministerial business. [1635]

This budget fails my constituents. It fails in a number of areas. You know, the government has made big hay out of the Evergreen line. I want to see the Evergreen line built, but there's still a \$171 million shortfall that has not yet been addressed.

J. Horgan: Four times they've announced it.

M. Farnworth: It's been announced after announced after announced after announced, and we're still waiting for that, and we need that. The budget doesn't address where that shortfall is coming from.

In terms of seismic upgrading. The Minister of Community Development made comments about the amount of money for seismic upgrading. Well, guess what. It may sound good, but they had to cut back from their original total, the original amount of money budgeted. The minister doesn't want to acknowledge that — that the government's own plan.... They failed to meet their own plan. They had to scale back, to say how much money they're going to spend.

This reminds me of Canada Post. The fact is that they can't deliver the mail in a three-day period. They'll say: "Oh, we delivered 96 percent of the mail within a three-day period." Or they'll stretch it and say: "We'll do it in a four-day period." The government failed in that regard.

They failed on education. They failed on health care. They failed on public safety. They failed on the transit services in my riding. So I will be voting against this budget.

Hon. W. Oppal: I rise to speak to Budget 2009. However, before I do that, hon. Speaker, I wish to state that I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to represent the people in Delta South in the upcoming provincial election.

Delta South is an absolutely wonderful community. I've lived there since 1998. Both of my children have gone to school there. My son played basketball there. My daughter still goes to school there, plays volleyball. It's a remarkable community, where people care for each other.

I prosecuted there in the 1970s and the '80s, and it's one of the safest communities in British Columbia. It's a community that's very well policed and well very looked after by the Delta police. I'm just particularly pleased to have the opportunity to represent the citizens and the voters of Delta South.

Having said that, I want to thank the voters of Vancouver-Fraserview for giving me the opportunity to represent them. It was awesome representing the voters of Vancouver-Fraserview. We did some wonderful things, particularly in working with the senior citizens of that community. It's a heterogeneous community, a multicultural community. It's a dynamic community. I'm proud and grateful to have the opportunity to represent Vancouver-Fraserview.

I am asked frequently why I left the Court of Appeal as a justice to embark on a career in this discipline. It is because I wanted to involve myself in the areas of social justice and policy. Again, I'm grateful to have had that opportunity, and I pledge to the citizens and the voters of Delta South that I will continue to work hard and to work towards social justice.

Now, I listened carefully to the speaker from Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain, particularly when he dealt with a subject that was clearly out of his element, the area of public safety. I must say that I was somewhat aghast when he spoke about gang warfare and about guns and bail and subjects which were obviously foreign to him. I say that because in the 1990s I was on the Supreme Court.

[1640]

In the 1990s we had some of the worst gang warfare that you can imagine. That was a time when the Dosanjh brothers were being gunned down, and Bindy Johal was involved. Poor Mr. Olson, an innocent victim, was a victim of criminal activity that was taking place on the streets.

You know, what was remarkable about that time was the fact that there was no concerted policy on behalf of the government to address those issues — none. The government of the day simply sat back and watched events as they unfolded.

In the 1990s I was asked by that government to conduct a royal commission on policing.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member.

Hon. W. Oppal: The royal commission on policing

involved various issues in terms of reference regarding policing, including the use of force, public accountability, the selection and promotion methods of our police, community-based policing, aboriginal policing and all of those matters. Included was one issue related to regional policing, which is a subject that comes up frequently in the public and in this chamber.

At that time I gave some advice to the government of the day. Unfortunately and regrettably, they did nothing about it. I find it somewhat inconsistent and hypocritical that on a daily basis they choose to give us advice as to how to address the issues regarding public safety, when they had a golden opportunity to do something productive in the 1990s, and they chose to do virtually nothing.

They did enact the Police Act of 1998. However, there are other issues regarding regional policing, regarding public accountability that were left alone. I must say that I am somewhat disappointed in many of the things that could have been done at that time.

Last weekend the Solicitor General and I were in Calgary, where we had meetings with Attorneys General from the western provinces and the Solicitors General from those provinces. On Saturday morning the senior member of the RCMP, who is head of the organized crime section for the province of Alberta, spoke to us, and he said something that most of us knew for a long time.

That is, he said that the gang activity that we see now is a result of inaction from the 1980s and the 1990s. He said that we could overcome this, but it will take an incredible amount of resources and initiative. He said that we had a golden opportunity in the 1990s to do something about it, had we embarked upon some creative methods of policing at that time. But unfortunately, the government of the day had a golden opportunity....

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member, just one moment, please.

Would you allow the member to have the floor, and show the courtesy to all members. The previous speaker had the floor, and everyone was courteous to him. So I'd appreciate that.

Member, please continue.

Hon. W. Oppal: You know, it's somewhat regrettable when I state these facts. I'm merely restating what the RCMP officer told us on Saturday morning. I'm merely stating what my experiences were as a justice of the Supreme Court of British Columbia. It's regrettable that the truth, as I see it, and the truth that was given at that time and the facts of what were taking place in our courts are matters that the members opposite have difficulty with.

In any event, we need to do something more product-

ive, and it was with those objectives in mind — that is, that we need to do something more — that the Solicitor General and I went to Ottawa. We went there in order to address three crucial issues regarding gang violence and criminal activity that are taking place on the streets.

They involved the updating of the privacy section of the Criminal Code; the wiretap sections of the Criminal Code that really have gone untouched since 1974; the two-for-one credit that is so offensive to reasonable-thinking people; and as well, to do something about the disclosure aspects of the trial process which bog down our courts.

[1645]

Those issues have been outstanding for a considerable period of time. I noted that when I was in the trial court up to 2003. Unfortunately, those issues needed to be dealt with. I must say that I'm very pleased that when the Solicitor General and I went to Ottawa, we met with the federal Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General, and our submissions regarding the innovations and the reform of the law were well received.

It's unfortunate that the government of the past — that is, the government of the '90s — did not have any kind of a reasonable relationship with the federal governments of the day. In fact, they were warring with the federal governments of the day. Unfortunately, they did not take it upon themselves to reform the much-needed reform of the criminal laws that were needed at that time.

So I'm particularly pleased that we are moving in the right direction, particularly when it comes to wiretap laws. You see, our present wiretap laws are such that it is extremely difficult to give our police the necessary tools that they need in order to investigate and bring to prosecution some of the crimes that are being committed on our streets. The wiretap laws, as they now stand, require the police to produce voluminous pieces of evidence — sometimes 200 and 300 pages of affidavits. They can only do that after they've investigated and exhausted all other investigative means and techniques.

We think that the law should be modernized and that the police ought to have the right to seek the interception of private communications immediately after the event — obviously, with the concurrence of judicial authorization. These are things that should have been done years ago, but they weren't.

I'm proud to say that we are embarking on those reforms, with the assistance of the federal government. So we're moving forward. That, together with the addition of 168 new police, the addition of more Crown prosecutors working with the police.... I pause here to note that for the first time in many years our Crown are working with the police, giving the police assistance, giving them relevant legal advice that is needed at the time of the investigation so that the evidence they secure will be more readily admissible in courtrooms.

Those are things that needed to be done years ago — particularly, as I said a moment ago, the laws that for the most part have been untouched and have not been reformed since the 1970s. So I'm particularly proud of the work that the Solicitor General and I did as far as proposing those changes.

The disclosure laws need to be changed significantly. You know, in the early 1990s, the Supreme Court of Canada issued a statement, through a case called *Stinchcombe*, in which they mandated that the police and the Crown were obligated to give particulars to the defence in order to make full answer in defence — a laudable objective.

However, what has happened since then is that the system has gone out of control, with voluminous amounts of evidence that now are required to give to the defence. What that does is bog down our trial process, and we have a difficult time getting cases to trial. Again, the federal government is extremely receptive to that and to the two-for-one credit that has been much discussed, so I think we're moving in the right direction when we do that.

The member opposite made light of the fact that Attorneys General from the Baja district of Mexico were here yesterday. That again shows how progressive we are, in that we need in this day and age to share information. We know that crimes do not confine themselves to geographical or to national boundaries. We know, for instance, that the crime that is taking place on our streets here has a direct link to other areas.

It is for that reason that the Attorney General from the Baja district of Mexico sought a meeting with us in order to share information and to draw upon the experience of our prosecutors and our police, so that their system can function more efficiently and more safely.

[1650]

As we know, the nation of Mexico is having considerable difficulties, having suffered through some 9,000 homicides in the past year, so we are most pleased to assist them in this particular challenge that they have if we're in a position to do that.

In any event, we're trying to share information. This is the criminal law of the future, criminal investigations of the future, where we need to pool our resources. We have to share our information with western provinces, with eastern provinces, as well as with our American neighbours. We know, for instance, that handguns that are used in crimes of violence are coming here, for the most part, from Washington State, so we need to have some kind of cooperation with that state in order to make our streets safer.

Those are some of the things that we're doing. We are involved, as well, in the transformation of both our criminal and civil justice systems. An example of that is the community court. The community court is perhaps the most creative thing that's been done in the criminal

justice system in our country in maybe 30 years.

I say that because it is a proactive form of problem-solving. It is a system by which the root causes of crime are addressed. The community court in Vancouver is functioning well. It opened in September of last year, and it is the first court of its kind in Canada. We have had other provinces and other states that want to come here in order to emulate what we are doing in the establishment of a community court.

Again, I am proud of the creative work that we have done in my ministry, and I thank all those people, from the Deputy Attorney General down, who are working in the courts, including the probation officers, the psychologists, the psychiatrists, the lawyers — all of whom are involved in order to achieve some success in what we're trying to do.

Similarly, in the area of the transformation of justice, our budget calls for a \$12 million initiative to ensure that our justice system is affordable, accessible and efficient. So what we are doing now is transforming the system from a rules-based system into a system that is solution-oriented.

To give you an example, in the area of family law, we are going to mandate that all disputes be sent to mediation so as to avoid the acrimony that is sometimes associated with an adversarial system. We need to ensure that all those people who have the negative experiences of family breakup have their disputes settled in a civil, amicable manner. It is with that in mind that we have dedicated resources to the Nanaimo Family Justice Centre.

The self-help centre in Vancouver is a similar initiative that has taken place, and again, these are creative, innovative methods that we are using to resolve disputes in our contemporary society. These are methods by which, I think, we can move forward and create a more civilized society.

As far as civil litigation is concerned, we are now embarking upon rule changes. We know that the vast majority of people who come in contact with the civil justice system find the system to be cumbersome, expensive and inaccessible. We are meeting with lawyers and meeting with the members of the public.

There has been an initiative led by Chief Justice Brenner and the Deputy Attorney General, who have toured the province and met with numerous groups. We are in the process of making some rule changes to expedite our justice system so that our citizens who live here can achieve justice in a reasonable and inexpensive way and so that no person will be denied justice in our democratic system.

Those are some of the things that we are doing, and I'm proud to say that our Budget 2009 addresses many of those concerns.

[1655]

The member opposite made reference to the fact of Crown counsel. In fact, we have budgeted for an addi-

tional 11 Crown counsel, who will be working with the gang squads, and we have 49 prosecutors who are working with the organized crime sections of the policing institutions.

Through the capital planning secretariat, we are undertaking infrastructure projects that will help create jobs and build opportunities in every region of the province, particularly as they pertain to the civil and criminal justice systems. Budget 2009 addresses those concerns and needs of our communities.

We need to have a system that is efficient, a system that is credible and a system that is accessible. For the first time in the 40 years that I've been in the system — these things need to be done — our initiatives and our methods are moving in that particular direction. These are not political issues. These are issues that all of us need to get involved in. It is through those initiatives that we will enhance the public service, which British Columbians depend upon the Ministry of Attorney General to deliver.

The Ministry of Attorney General is not immune to the current economic situation in which all provinces and nations now find themselves. This House is only too aware of the volatile commodity prices, the instability in financial markets and the weaker global economies that have a detrimental effect on provincial revenues. The economic downturn has resulted in a reduction of \$6.6 billion in revenue.

However, those challenges must be met, so we are moving towards a system, particularly in the area of legal services, where we want to ensure that no person is denied access to the courts, denied access to justice. What we're trying to do and what we are doing is, by having.... For instance, in the small claims court division of the Provincial Court, we now have night court, where citizens can attend a pilot project and receive mediation services that are available to them. That is another way we can resolve disputes between parties.

Those are some of the things that we are doing in the civil and criminal justice fields, and it is with those factors in mind that I am asking that this budget be approved by this House. I am, obviously, speaking in support of that. I want to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak in support of this budget.

S. Simpson: I look forward to having the opportunity to engage in the budget debate, and I will get to those comments.

Just in passing reference to the last speaker, the Attorney General, who just spoke on the budget, I would note that of course, we know there are significant cuts in the budget around prosecution services, around Crown counsel and around the court system. The head of the Crown Counsel Association, in reference to that on budget day, said that they run a pretty tight ship, essentially, and saw no way that they could possibly absorb

the cuts that this Attorney General was foisting upon them at that time.

Of course, we know that at the time that this occurred, the Attorney General, when he was quizzed about this outside, made comments in *The Vancouver Sun* about how, for years 2 and 3 of the budget cycle, anything could happen between now and then and that this is something that may or may not happen in years 2 or 3 of the budget cycle, essentially telling us that we shouldn't pay attention to the next couple of years of the budget.

I would suggest that that probably holds true for the budget generally. I suspect it is the government's intention, the Premier's intention and the Finance Minister's intention that this is the May 12 budget. By May 13 the budget isn't worth the paper it's written on, as the government, if they should get re-elected, will come back with a very different agenda.

[1700]

Sadly, I'm sure, it's an agenda that will be very hurtful for most British Columbians and extremely hurtful for those British Columbians who are vulnerable. With a little luck and a hard campaign, the people of British Columbia won't have that foisted upon them come May 12.

I'm pleased to get an opportunity to speak, mostly because this will be my last opportunity to make a significant speech, I'm sure, before we head to the adjournment of this session and head to the May 12 election. I'm very happy that I've had the opportunity over the last four years to represent the people of Vancouver-Hastings. It's been a great privilege and an honour for me to be able to do that. It's a fabulous community and constituency. It's one where I've grown up and spent a good part of my life. I spent pretty much all my life in East Vancouver and certainly a great part of it in Vancouver-Hastings.

It's a constituency that's very diverse. It's diverse in terms of its ethnic makeup. It's diverse in terms of its demographic, in terms of the incomes of people, the careers of people. It is a very interesting and exciting constituency.

It's also a constituency of people who have great compassion for each other. It's a community that, when people are facing challenges, their neighbours step up and support them. Their neighbours come to their aid. That's a very common thing in Vancouver-Hastings. I hear time and time again about people talking about needing to support the efforts of their neighbours or help their neighbours to meet the challenges that they're facing, or talking about the need for us to reach out and do more for the most vulnerable people in the constituency.

It is a constituency of many challenges. It's a constituency that has the largest urban aboriginal population in British Columbia. It's a large aboriginal population. It's a great community. Much of the native housing is in my constituency. There are constituents who are working very hard to build and retain the culture of their

community and figure out how it fits within an urban context. There are many fabulous organizations that are working with them to make sure that those things are achieved, and that's a great thing.

It's very diverse in terms of its ethnicity. A very large Chinese community — about 40 percent of my constituents are Chinese-speaking. They've made a great contribution to my community, as they have to all of British Columbia. They really do play an integral role in the fabric of what is Vancouver-Hastings, and I'm very fortunate to have the opportunity to represent those constituents.

It's also a constituency with challenges. Poverty is a very real part of the face of Vancouver-Hastings. Poverty is a very real part of what people deal with every day.

I think that in the last statistics I saw, Vancouver-Hastings, based on Stats Canada numbers, is the second poorest constituency in British Columbia. I see that every day. I see it on the streets. I see it in the people who come into my office seeking support. I see it in the people who come into my office wondering where they're going to live because they have no place to live, coming in because they have no money and they're worried about how they feed their families and about how they deal with those issues, people who come in who have challenges around addictions, around mental health issues. It's an occurrence every day, every single day.

Numbers of people who face these challenges are in my office, and I'm very fortunate with the staff that I have in my office — Brenda Tombs and Rachel Garrick. They do an incredible job. For most of my constituents who come in, they really are the face of my office because of the nature of our work — which every member would know — and they do a remarkable job in supporting my constituents.

For many of the constituents, the reality is that they see themselves as anonymous. They see themselves as not being heard, and sometimes the important thing we can do for them is to provide a place where they get to tell their story and they get to be heard — and not just to be heard, but to be listened to. We hope we're able to do something to support them in the challenges that they face every day.

Sometimes a little bit of what that is, is to simply listen in a very sincere way and be able to, hopefully, provide some sort of support. Brenda and Rachel do a fabulous job of doing that when I'm not there. I appreciate their support very much, as I do appreciate, certainly, the support of Heidi Reid who does my work here in the Legislature and helps keep me on track. We all know what that entails, keeping on track here.

[1705]

So I'm very fortunate. I'm fortunate, obviously — as I'm sure the vast majority, if not every member, in this Legislature feels — to have the privilege to be in this place and to do what we do.

I'm also very fortunate that I have a very accomplished, thoughtful, committed and compassionate group of people that work with me and support the work that I do. Of course, my family — my wife Cate and my daughter Shayla. Well, they put up with the machinations of being an MLA and everything that that means — being away or not paying as much attention as I should pay sometimes. They let me know about that. That's all good, and they keep me on track. I love them both dearly, and it appears they still love me, so that's a good thing too.

Hon. S. Bond: It's always a good thing.

S. Simpson: It's always a good thing, as the Minister of Education says, and she's right.

Now, those challenges that my constituents face are broad. Some of them are immediate challenges that are faced by them as individuals or by their families, and some of them are policy challenges that they see in this province.

I think back, prior to the budget, when the Premier was talking about the budget and when the Premier was talking about the deficit. I recall the Premier in an interview that I heard, or I believe it was in his comments, when he and the Finance Minister were acknowledging that British Columbia would be going into deficit. He talked about how he lost sleep over going into deficit and how it was one of the most difficult times he had and how challenged he was facing the reality of what British Columbia was facing.

I thought: "Well, you know, that's fine. It's good that the Premier is losing some sleep over going into deficit." But I was disappointed, and what I was disappointed about in the Premier's comments was that I didn't hear the Premier at any time say that he was losing sleep over people who were living in poverty in British Columbia. I never heard him talk about losing any sleep over that.

We know from Stats Canada numbers that almost one in four children in this province live in poverty and have for a number of years. We have had the worst record on that issue for a number of years now. In some places, in constituencies like mine, the number is closer to one in two. What we know is that those vulnerable kids don't live in the world by themselves. They're part of poor families, and the poverty that those families face is something that we have a responsibility to meet the challenge of.

When the Premier loses sleep over the deficit, I wish the Premier would stand up in this House or wherever he chooses to do it and say: "I lose sleep over those people in this province who live in poverty. I lose sleep over those people in this province who don't know if they'll have enough to eat, who don't know if they can pay the bills, the key bills." But we haven't heard the Premier say that.

I would like to hear the Premier say that. I'd like to

hear the Premier say: "I have a commitment." To make the commitment that here's the time line, here's an agenda for how we begin to deal with this issue of poverty. It doesn't happen overnight. We all know that. But where's the time line? Where are the goals? Where are the benchmarks for this government on how poverty gets addressed in this province?

We're an incredibly wealthy place, even in a time of economic challenge. We still are a very wealthy and prosperous place, and it's not right that so many of our neighbours and our friends and our family live in that dire straits. But we haven't heard that from the Premier. We haven't heard how those almost one in four kids, how their parents deal with this. We know that that is about money, but we also know that half of those families have a paycheque coming into their household. Half of those families earn an income. They're working. They're trying to make it work, but they still live in poverty.

[1710]

Many of the over 200,000-odd folks who are living on a minimum wage have not seen an increase in that minimum wage for eight years. Not only is it a problem that they haven't seen an increase in the minimum wage, but it's remarkable that the Premier saw fit in the throne speech to make a virtue out of the fact that the minimum wage has not been increased in this province for eight years and how it would not be increased in this final year of this government. He chose to make that statement in the throne speech. It was unfortunate, it was disappointing, and frankly, it showed a level of neglect by this government for the people who most need our support.

We do need that minimum wage increase. We do need to have a time line and an agenda with benchmarks to deal with the question of poverty in this province. Unfortunately, we didn't hear that the Premier has lost any sleep over that issue.

We have forest-dependent communities across this province that have obviously been hit very hard, first by the shifts in the forest economy, then by the beetle and now by a collapse of the economy. When you travel, and I'm sure members opposite are no different, as British Columbia.... Those of us in the urban areas of B.C. all of a sudden realized that we had hit the economic wall here in British Columbia. Well, people in those communities, when you go and visit them, say: "Welcome to our world."

They hit that wall a couple of years ago, and they've been struggling economically in those towns and communities for a much longer time. They've been struggling with the challenges of closed mills. The numbers continue to grow. They've been struggling with the lost jobs. They've been struggling with the lost economic opportunity in their communities, and they haven't heard the Premier say that he lost any sleep over that. That's unfortunate.

People in those communities — local political lead-

ers, business leaders, union leaders, community leaders, elected officials, just folks on the street trying to find a paycheque and make a living.... The Premier didn't tell them that he's lost any sleep over the circumstances that they've faced and that they continue to face. They don't see a plan that gives them any hope that this will turn around.

As much as the Attorney General wants to talk about what the government is or isn't doing around gangs and gun violence, what I know is that for most of the eight years of this government's term, this was not an issue for this government. It became an issue when on a daily basis people started getting shot in the streets — of the Lower Mainland, primarily — and then when innocent people started to die. It's at that point, when the outrage of citizens and the pictures every day leading the news finally become such a political situation, a political crisis, that the Premier steps up and has something to say.

Interestingly, and we've certainly seen this on enough occasions, the Premier steps up and makes proclamations about what will and won't be done. But this budget that we're talking about and debating now, which is presented at essentially the same time, doesn't reflect the resources to fulfil the proclamations of the Premier.

I suspect the reality about this is because it was cobbled together at the last minute, as many things are with this government. It was put together with some help on how to message from the public affairs bureau and the handful of people who, along with the Premier, apparently run British Columbia. Somewhere along the line, the cabinet and the caucus, I guess, read about it in the newspaper with the rest of us, as we all of a sudden had a gang strategy.

But there's no money in the budget to support that strategy. I don't see the money in the budget to deal with intervention. I don't see the supports there.

It's unfortunate, and I suspect the reality is that it's because the Premier didn't lose any sleep over gangs and gun violence. He was too busy losing sleep over a deficit. But he didn't lose any sleep over gangs and gun violence and how that affects the community until such time as the political temperature was turned up so high that he had no choice but to scramble and cobble together something to get through the next couple of months.

[1715]

We obviously saw a very similar situation with the first nations in British Columbia. We know that we had the new relationship. We know that the frustration of the first nations over what was the vacuous nature of the new relationship finally came to a head when they said, "We will have none of this. We want some real change. We want the change that was promised in the new relationship to be realized in a legislative initiative" — something the government had no intention of doing.

Then, of course, as we know, it attempted to cobble that together in the last short few weeks, hoping to bring something forward. But what we know is that it was done with little consultation. The first nations know that,

and the public knows that.

Again, it became another promise that isn't going to be fulfilled, and we will see what the result of that is long term. This is a government that made commitments to the first nations, commitments that they never fulfilled, and they're now scrambling to cobble together something at the last minute.

Interestingly, I'm sure this is something that certainly the backbench, and I suspect the cabinet as well, probably read about in the newspaper, because I'm sure they weren't part of this conversation about what this legislation would look like. I'm sure they weren't part of this conversation about how to deal with this. You can be sure of that. That is the Premier's style — one man with a group of anonymous advisers around him who believes that British Columbia is his fiefdom.

We've seen the same thing in relation to health care. We haven't seen the Premier losing a lot of sleep over that. The situation with seniors. We haven't seen a lot of sleep lost over that. The situation with education. We hear every day about the amount of money going into education, but we also see the cuts. We see the challenges around special education. We know that in special education, those needs aren't being fulfilled.

We see the impacts surrounding English as a second language that are not being fulfilled. We see the issues around class composition that are not being fulfilled. It really is a situation where education.... Who it mostly has failed is it's failed children, it's failed parents, and it's frustrated educators. That's the reality. The Premier has lost no sleep over the challenges of education. Not easy challenges to fix. There's no question about that, but you can be sure the Premier lost no sleep over that.

So we have this situation. We have the situation where the Premier has lost sleep over the deficit, but certainly has not lost sleep over any of these issues.

Now, what we do know is that the one place where we've seen wild enthusiasm has been in privatization. We have seen this government moving on privatization in a pretty methodical approach for the past eight years.

To try to privatize.... A third of B.C. Hydro gets privatized — pieces here, pieces there. Private health care is advanced. We now see the privatization of our water systems. We see all of that. We see the continued privatization of these services.

What this isn't about is public interest. It's about private profit. What we know is that we can pretty much go back, and we can link those privatization schemes and those projects to Liberal campaign donations as well. We'll see more of that over the coming weeks as we talk more about the connection between privatization and Liberal campaign donations.

What we haven't seen is the public interest being taken care of. We haven't seen it in any thoughtful way.

We have seen, with private power projects, not a ques-

tion of how you find green power. What we have seen with private power projects, quite honestly, is a gold-rush mentality around the province. We have seen that, as this government scrambles to give away as many of our resources as they can to the people who are their political allies and friends. That's what happens in this province. Every day we see that. That's what happens every day.

But it's not a surprise. This is a government that doesn't believe in government, that doesn't believe in the role of government, that doesn't believe in the role of government to defend the public interest.

It is a government that believes it is there to accommodate the private interest. It is a government that believes it is there to accommodate the private interest to the greatest degree possible. By doing that, it erodes the British Columbia context, I believe.

[1720]

It's why people around this province get frustrated. They get angry, and they don't get listened to. And what do we see? When people speak out in this province, when people speak out or raise concerns, they get put down by this government.

We saw this government.... When people in the Squamish-Lillooet area raised concerns about the Ashlu and private power there, of course this government introduced Bill 30 and crushed them. What did the member responsible for that area do?

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member, order.

S. Simpson: The member responsible for that area was only too happy to have the rights of this regional district taken away, only too happy to remove democracy from elected people in her community. She thought that was just fine. That's true for member after member on that side, with the introduction of things like Bill 30.

That's the reality of what we're dealing with. Why does this happen? Why do we have this budget? Why do we have a situation where the province is in this state? Well, it's about a government structure that is flawed and has failed, and it has failed in this way.

You have a Premier who, after almost eight years in office, truly believes he is the one person who knows what's best for British Columbia. He has in large part dismissed other input — apparently dismissed other input even from some of his elected colleagues on the other side, if not a majority of them.

He has demonstrated a level of arrogance that is second to none in this country. He is not in touch with the needs of British Columbians, and he has demonstrated a level of neglect for our most vulnerable citizens that is unconscionable. But that's the one-man show that is our Premier. What we know.... I'm sure that....

Interjection.

S. Simpson: Well, I'm sure the Speaker would like the member to afford me the same rights that the Speaker asked me to afford others — quite rightly and appropriately, I would say.

What we have is a one-man show, a one-man show that scrambles...

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member, please.
Continue.

S. Simpson: ...to try to put out fires and cobble together plans at the last minute to get through the next political crisis.

We have seen this time and time again. Time and time again, we have seen the Premier not listen, make decisions that seem to come out of somewhere over in his office with him and his small cadre of advisers and are foisted upon the rest of British Columbia, and then British Columbians struggle to figure out what it means. Then the plans change after somebody finally talks some sense to him periodically, and he backs away. He has others where he has not backed away, and clearly, bad planning and bad ideas continue — or bad ideas, not much planning.

Well, we can hope that we'll get a chance to discuss that more over the next few weeks, and then we'll see. The people of British Columbia will make their decision. But for now, and for this budget.... The problem we have with this budget is this. It's a budget that....

We saw it today. I see British Columbia now is leading the country in increased unemployment as our numbers grow more than anywhere else in the country, as challenges grow in this province, challenges that are created by a whole bunch of circumstances. Some are local, but many aren't. Many come, obviously, from global or international impacts in commodity prices — all of those things that at one time drove a successful economy. Those things, quite fairly, are now crippling the economy in many ways.

The problem, though, with that, and this is part of what makes this budget so suspect in its way.... Part of the challenge with that is that this government has refused to acknowledge the reality of the economic situation we're in. They have refused to begin to look at how they temper those impacts in a meaningful way for the people who will be most hurt by them.

[1725]

Instead, they're just on their merry way here, doing what they do, and that's unfortunate. It's unfortunate because everybody in this room — certainly, those of us who get to come back — will all be fine. We all have good enough paycheques. We'll all live through this and

be fine, but there are lots of people in constituencies like my constituency — and, I'm sure, people in every, or almost every, constituency in this room — who are going to be hurt in real terms by this circumstance, and they are not going to see support from this government to help them get over that.

We will have that debate over the next coming weeks, and it will be resolved one way or the other on May 12. But what we need to pay attention to now, and what I look forward to hearing more about from members on the other side, as well, is how we begin to address these issues.

I look forward to members on that side getting up and talking about the real challenges we face, the people who are really being hurt and how we move forward to address those issues. I'm hoping that we're going to hear that from members on the other side as they make their speeches.

In closing, the budget itself. It's good to have this budget debate, to be able to talk about the issues in big terms. But in terms of the specifics of this budget, not many people in this room — I suspect, not many people on that side of the room either — actually believe this is a sincere or a serious budget, actually believe this is a budget that's meant to get us much past May 12 or actually believe this is a budget that will sustain itself for a whole 12 months.

They certainly don't believe that it's a budget that will meet its projections as numbers begin to unravel. We can be sure of that. But it is the budget that we're dealing with today.

It's a budget that doesn't meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens. It's a budget that doesn't have thoughtful projections in it. It's a budget that does not meet the needs of the public interest, and that's unfortunate.

It's a budget that has not earned people's support. It's a budget that does not deserve the support of British Columbians nor the support of thoughtful people in this chamber. And it's a budget that in due course, I'm sure, will be set aside. It's our hope that it's a budget that will be set aside, because after May 12 we on this side will have the opportunity to bring in a budget that actually works for British Columbians.

With that, I'll take my place.

Hon. R. Cantelon: I rise today to support the budget, which I think provides many good measures and will continue the forward progress that this administration has begun.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

I'd first like to begin by thanking the constituents that I represent. I'm very happy and very grateful and, frankly, Madam Speaker, honoured to do so. I'm very honoured because of the nature of the people in the communities that I represent, from Nanaimo to Lantzville, Nanoose

Bay, Parksville and Qualicum Beach. I hope to, if the election goes my way.

They're very industrious. Generally speaking, they're a very optimistic group. They aren't unconcerned about the current economic threats that seem to be posed globally and provincially, but they have a "can-do, let's get it done" attitude that I think is really typical of British Columbia. Not only that, they're very generous in how they support members of the community.

Recently there was a project underway where the builders association, led by Mr. Doug Bromage and his InSight Group, volunteered to contribute to build some social housing that was badly needed in the community. The city of Nanaimo came forward with a piece of property very appropriate for the usage, rezoned it at their cost and made it available on a long-term, basically a dollar a year, lease.

They had the property, and they had the initiative represented by the development community to build, they thought, six units or maybe four units. If they put up the money for four, then perhaps the province could come along and match it and build eight. That was the initial concept.

[1730]

I'm very pleased to report that the construction is nearing completion of this unit on Bowen Road, and it's going to be 20 units. I'm proud that the provincial government supported it and responded to this generous community initiative to more than double the size of the initial project. That's the kind of community I represent, and I'm very proud to do it because of the type of people there. I'm very proud and very honoured to do that.

I'd also like to thank.... As other speakers have acknowledged, you can't do this alone. You have to get continuing support on the home front, and I'd like to thank my wife and two children at home, who endure my absence — maybe revel in my absence. I'm not sure. It may be the case. My grown children too: Katrina, who lives next door to me; and two in the Lower Mainland, one who works as a teacher and one as a lawyer — who follow with some interest, at least, my political career and have been very supportive in my discussions.

Of course, none of us do it, again, without the support of our staff — our constituency staffs and, in my case, ministry staff — to help get the real work done.

Coming back to the community of Nanaimo. They're a very optimistic group, a very forward-thinking group, and they respond to government programs in an innovative way, I think. We recently identified several needs in the community, and rather than them going forward one at a time with a hand out to this ministry or a hand out to that ministry, they collaborated and put together an ask which they called a shared vision. They recognized the need for development of some economic opportunities in the city of Nanaimo. The government, I'm happy to say, responded.

What they identified was the expansion of the airport so that they could accommodate jet travel. Now, this benefits not only the city of Nanaimo, but it benefits the entire south end of the mid-Island area from Cowichan to Courtenay, because certainly air travel is an important aspect of modern commerce.

Another opportunity that they saw and came together on was the expansion of the docks to accommodate a cruise ship terminal. Again, we've been very happy to have received over a hundred cruise ship visits in recent years. They bring energy and enthusiasm to downtown and purchasing power from fresh money injected into the economy.

The conference centre was well underway, but they recognized they hadn't been able to adapt to some of the greening initiatives. Nanaimo considers itself very much a green community, and I'll talk about that in a minute. They received \$5 million to green the conference centre and be more in tune with the sympathies of climate action, climate change.

So for all these reasons, for the foresight of the community, I'm happy to represent them. It's easy for our government to respond when the community does a lot of initiative and groundwork on their own.

One of the most current ones is their homelessness strategy and homeless outreach. They collaborate with social services, with VIHA, with mental health, with the bylaw officers and with the RCMP to reach out to the community. We're happy that we were able to support that initiative with \$140,000 to fund two mental health workers that go out, talk to people on the street, build their trust, develop a rapport and then get them off the street.

Their success rate is tremendous. They get them the social services they need, the health services they need, housing — a place to sleep that isn't on the street, that is dry and warm and consistent, that lifts their self-image and provides them a measure of dignity. Their success rate.... They don't keep exact numbers, but they tell me it's between 80 and a hundred people they've successfully taken off the streets.

So there are many, many good reasons to be proud of the people I represent. They're moving forward. We've been supportive of their initiatives in many ways.

I'm happy to report to the House and acknowledge to them that we responded with \$39 million for the expansion of the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital. This was a facility that was half-built under the previous administration, under the NDP administration, and the building was left empty for ten years. They did part of it but left this empty shell of a structure unused for nearly ten years.

I'm proud to say that the government response was to build six operating theatres, which serve the community very, very effectively now as a regional general hospital from the Malahat north. A couple of other hospital

additions, where we recently invested \$16½ million for family-centred maternity care. This certainly was a very sympathetic and empathetic way to present the birthing experience to a family and to a woman in particular.

In fact, I encouraged my wife — although we have a total of five children now — to see if she was inspired to expand the family further. She didn't volunteer to do that.

[1735]

Hon. S. Bond: She didn't?

Hon. R. Cantelon: She did, but I'm afraid I wasn't as enthusiastic as she was, perhaps.

But it's a wonderful facility, and it's a great service to the community. It also provides an advanced tier 2 level of maternity care for those small children that perhaps are born prematurely or born with some medical needs that need attention. So they don't have to be flown out of the island and out of the community.

We've also just recently invested in the hospital a much-needed 12-bed palliative care unit to the tune of \$2.8 million, and this was very much needed as well. It was an older part of the hospital, and again, it was put together and designed actually by some of the people who work in the palliative care. Their input was very valued in what they wanted to see in there to make it as comfortable and as enriching an experience as that type of care can be.

It has been very well received, and I want to compliment the Minister of Health for the work that Vancouver Island Health Authority did in making this a wonderful facility. The feedback has been tremendous from everybody who works there and the people who are served by this.

The next most important thing that we're looking at now — we've had discussions with Mr. Waldner of the Vancouver Island Health Authority — is an urgent care centre and a walk-in clinic for Parksville. Now, Parksville and Qualicum Beach — Oceanside, as we call it — is an area that badly needs a centre not only for primary health care but for urgent health care.

I want to compliment the mayors of Parksville and Qualicum for getting together with me and cooperating well — Ed Mayne and Teunis Westbroek — as well as regional chair Joe Stanhope. We went and visited a couple of facilities, both in Chemainus and Ladysmith, and said: "Well, this has some elements that we want." We want to be able to have a place where patients can receive urgent care no matter what their malady is, and then, if need be, they can be forwarded on to Nanaimo Hospital.

Again, I want to compliment Vancouver Island Health Authority for their support in sending administrative and planning staff to evaluate it. What they came up with was that there are nearly 8,000 visits in the central Island area that could be treated, dealt with in an urgent

care centre, perhaps held for observation and in many, many cases sent home.

If they are forwarded on to Nanaimo General Hospital, they would be forwarded with a pre-diagnostic package including blood work, radiology and other things so that they could immediately be accepted into the emergency without standing or waiting in a queue, which can be extremely stressful, especially if you add that to the 30- to 40-minute drive in to the hospital.

That, I think, is something that needs to be done. I've received support from the Minister of Health on this type of facility, and it's certainly going to be a top priority for me as a candidate and for me as a future MLA to see this happen for the Oceanside area. It's a top priority.

So there are many things. Other areas that we've responded to health care.... In the last election I spoke about the need to respond to the needs of seniors and seniors housing, and again, I would compliment Vancouver Island Health Authority and the ministry for supporting the needs. It's been really quite impressive.

They've created 35 units through investment of \$6 million in Kiwanis place in the city of Nanaimo, and up in Nanaimo we've added the Stanford Place and also the Cokely Manor to the tune of 180 assisted-living units to accommodate the seniors, and there's many of them in that area, because, as you know, Oceanside is regarded as the healthiest place to live in British Columbia. I think the longevity and the high average age is a testament to that.

People live longer, live happier, live healthier in the Oceanside area. It's part of the lifestyle. It's part of the ethic. So \$40 million into Stanford Place and \$4.5 million into Cokely Manor, and I think I said 180 units altogether. We've done a lot to respond to community needs, and it's going on.

The water issue is a very, very important issue in the regional district, and we started by giving \$100,000 to Malaspina College to do a risk assessment of watershed analysis in the area because they depend on ground-water. So an assessment has been done as to what the risk can be. We funded that.

[1740]

Of course, our well-water program, wherein every well is registered and the potability, not just the volume of the water, has to be recorded every year. We've recently expanded that with a \$221,000 grant in the Towns for Tomorrow program for drinking water and watershed protection monitoring, in which ten ground-water observation wells will be done on existing wells and 15 additional wells will be monitored to provide more data to assess the quality of the aquifer.

I was very happy to be recently in Parksville. We provided funding for the provincial-federal funding for Towns for Tomorrow for a complete upgrade of an old waterline on Wright Road. This was very well received in that community.

Of particular interest, we also announced in Qualicum Beach recently an upgrade of their major water supply to the tune of a total of \$2.2 million. This will provide a stable, reliable and safe water supply for the community of Qualicum Beach for some time. This was Mayor Teunis Westbroek's top priority. It was an extremely well-documented application and one that we were happy to respond to.

I think responding to the needs that are identified in the community is a hallmark of our government and of our budget. All of these programs are about jobs. All of these programs are about getting things ready, keeping people working but also building an infrastructure so that as the economy recovers, the town can respond to expansion without having to go in the hole before they move forward. I think these are excellent programs. There are many of them.

Nanaimo Spirit Square has also been a good project for the city of Nanaimo, because it's a great area, in the Maffeo-Sutton Park, where people will gather. It's a very well-used park, and gathering together is important. Developing the community spirit is an important part of what we do in supporting communities.

It's that kind of community spirit that provides the support for programs that I mentioned earlier, where the private industry comes forward and volunteers money, supplies and real aid to building social housing. The communities up and down the Island in the mid-range have always been generous in their support of all sorts of good causes and helping their neighbours. So there are many, and I've touched on a few.

Of course, everyone signed up to the climate action program, and I was happy to tell them that in recognition of their commitment to it, we refunded the taxes payable. Of particular note are the initiatives in greening the community. The regional district of Nanaimo recently won a green municipality award. They could probably win it every year, because they're collecting methane gas on their landfill, and they're converting it into electrical energy and pumping it back into the grid.

Besides that, they've already diverted 60 percent of the material that used to go into the landfill into composting and recycling programs. They're leading the country, and I compliment Chair Stanhope and his directors for doing that. And they're continuing it. They recently had a program of all commercial waste from restaurants going into recycling and composting, and now they've expanded that into a home service delivery too.

I want to say that the response of the community to these initiatives to recycle and to become more conscious, broadly speaking, about greening our community has been tremendous.

I'd also like to say, speaking to the budget, that this was not an easy process. The government has made and continues to make its commitments to reduce taxes, especially the tax burden on the lowest incomes,

so that there's no tax payable on people up to \$16,000. To support child care subsidies for people earning up to \$28,000, daycare subsidies.... And we continue to respond to needs. We've increased the rates of payments to people on social assistance for the first time in many years and increased residential allowances to people on social assistance as well as to seniors.

It wasn't an easy time. I sat on Treasury Board, and while I can't speak of it specifically, I can certainly say that it was a well-thought-through process. It was not an easy decision that the board or the budget committee came to. It is a realistic one. There won't be one, as alluded to by the member for Vancouver-Hastings, that will be thrown out, and we'll get a new one. That's not what we do. That's not where we're going.

[1745]

There won't be any fudge-it in this budget, I can assure you. This budget we'll run on and stand behind coming out of the election. It would have been perhaps easy.... It has been done by the opposition when they were in power to just.... "Well, let's just throw out a number. Let's not worry about it because we know it won't work, and we'll run up a deficit later."

We spent the last ten years digging our way out of that hole, reducing the debt from 20 percent of our gross GDP down to 14 percent of our GDP. The feedback I'm getting is that people respect our work and our efforts to do just that. That's why they have confidence that we're the best-suited party to run the government after the next election. That's the feedback I'm getting very clearly in the constituency. This budget makes available what is really about creating jobs in many, many ways.

I want to speak very briefly about my new assignment as Agriculture Minister. It's been interesting. I think most people who know me know that I don't have an extensive background in agriculture — quite the opposite. But I'm really encouraged by the response I'm getting from people in the industry as I meet them.

I went to the agriculture gala in Abbotsford. These people are among the most innovative entrepreneurs you can meet — very typical, I think, of the spirit that made this great province. They're willing to take a chance and make investment.

I sat beside a woman who has a blueberry farm in Richmond. I believe she's a neighbour of one of our members. I was kind of astounded when she told me that she'd invested \$20,000 to start with — really, \$20,000 on her own property — to enter the blueberry business, a business that she won't see return on anywhere from two to five years. But there they go: "We'll risk the family farm, literally speaking, in order to do this blueberry venture." I found that very entrepreneurial, very risk-taking.

Then she didn't stop there. She decided: "Well, I'm not going to sell directly, but since I don't have enough to buy all my product, what I'm going to do is set up

a little blueberry winery." She sells blueberry wine off the premises, and I understand that that's very popular too. So one investment was compounded with a second investment.

I recently visited a farm out in Qualicum — an area that I hope to represent after the next election — the little Qualicum cheese factory. This is sort of a model, I think, of wholeness and integrity in a farm. The cheese is made from cows on their farm, so it's all self-contained. They have now gone into a winery business and also expanded to the tourism business. At the recent Parksville Glassie awards they were, therefore, accorded business of the year, Entrepreneurs of the Year, an accord that they richly deserve.

I'd like to make note, too, of the Comox Valley just north of my constituency. These people took their brie to Paris. Imagine the audacity of that: taking brie to the great cheese country of the world, France, and to not only do that, but they won a gold medal. I think that speaks, again, to the entrepreneurship, to the integrity, to the hard work of our farming community. One thing is certain when you meet farmers. They're generous to you in their comments, and they're committed, passionately committed, to what they do in producing good-quality, excellent food.

We should celebrate that. The food is of superior quality. The freshness is terrific, and they're to be congratulated. They're truly passionate about their commitment to creating great products and great foods.

I think I'll close. But in closing, I want to talk about one other industry in Nanaimo, and that's Harmac. It's known well in the community for their innovation and their spirit. Now, this was a company that went bankrupt, Pope and Talbot. It would have been easy for everyone just to say: "Well, let's just disband. Let's go home. Let's take what benefits we can. Let's wring a few bucks out of the government and carry on."

I had the privilege of going with them at the three court appearances where they were struggling to take the company. There were many bidders who wanted to break it up and disperse the products as best they could and get rid of the machinery and equipment, but this group of hard-working people, management and union members, decided to get together and work to a common interest and to develop this mill.

[1750]

They succeeded. They bought the mill, and they got production up. We went with the then Minister of Forests at the time at an announcement where they celebrated the opening of the mill, the grand opening with the first bale of pulp. It was pretty interesting. You could sense that the workers were there shuffling around, not because they were hearing another boring speech or two from politicians, which of course they did hear, but because they wanted to get back to work, get back and get the product going. Yes, it's a smaller, more modest

group, but there are a couple of aspects to it.

First of all, there's no acrimony between management and the staff. Not that there ever was, but now there's no overlap. They're all working together towards a common goal. The other significant factor is that the management is not looking over their shoulder at some owner back east somewhere that's just looking at this project as a bottom line on their balance sheet.

They're committed to making that work, and they're going to. Their production per tonne, tonne per man, is up by 25 percent. Their costs are down by 20 percent by looking not just at wages — in fact, not especially at wages — but by looking at every way that they can improve the efficiency and the economy of the operation. And they're carrying on. They have big plans.

They have big plans to expand, to look into electrical energy, to look into other products. There are many new exciting products in the forest industry. The forest industry on Vancouver Island and throughout the province is going to continue in the future to be a long-term renewable resource and a great source of employment and revenue for the entire province.

I'd just like to close by saying that yes, we're an optimistic people in British Columbia. The latest consumer confidence report is showing us over 80 percent, well ahead of the Canadian average. I'm proud to represent a community that I think is probably ahead of that average.

With that, I think this budget supports the aspirations and the hopes of the people in the constituency that I represent, and I strongly urge every member of the House to support it.

K. Conroy: I rise to take my place in response to the budget that was presented in this House on February 17. But before I speak to the budget, I, too, want to take a moment to say some thank-yous. I want to thank the people who support me in this weird and wonderful world of politics.

First to Ed, who gets a huge thanks for his incredible support. I think it's what goes around comes around, and it's payback time, etc. I have to admit I'm very, very fortunate to have a husband who really, truly understands this business. I heard the member for Prince George–Mount Robson refer to her anniversary today. Actually, tomorrow is our anniversary of 28 years. I think that in the last 20 years we very rarely have shared our anniversary together. Maybe that's why we've stayed together so long. With him down here for ten years and then me for five, they've been interesting years.

Also, I want to thank our wonderful kids, their partners and grandkids. I want to thank them all for their support. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that today is actually our oldest daughter Jennifer's birthday, which I'm not usually home for either. A happy birthday to her too. We were extremely fortunate to have the great kids we do, especially because they gave us the great grand-

kids we have. Ed refers to me and says that he thinks I'm a bit cuckoo about them.

When I talk to other people who are grandparents, they also agree that you get a bit cuckoo about your grandkids. It's because they mean so much, and we want to make sure that we can give them something. I think that's why I do the job I do — because I want to make sure that I can pass on to them some of the things that I've been able to benefit from in my lifetime.

I also want to thank our extended family and friends for the enormous support that I get. The member for Nelson-Creston likes to say that I win my nominations and elections just by getting my family out.

To that member I want to give personal thanks for his years of service to the province and to our area. We got to know each other pretty well when he and Ed lived together here in Victoria in the '90s — stories that I won't tell. But I do want to thank him for his support and advice and tell him that I look forward to having him, as he says, as one of my most difficult constituents after May 12.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible team of women who work in my office in the constituency and here in Victoria. I'm really, really fortunate to have amazing people to work with day in and day out. I also want to acknowledge all the people we work with in our caucus here. We are extremely fortunate to have just an incredible team, and they make us all look very, very good.

The best part of what we do in this job, I believe, is the people we get to meet when we do the job. There are days that are incredibly tough, and the people we are meeting have extremely difficult stories to share. Then there are days when it's all smiles, as we know that we've managed to help a constituent in a way that's made his or her life that much brighter.

[1755]

As I listened to the budget being presented, I couldn't help but think that this is a budget that did very little for the people that I represent in the constituency of West Kootenay–Boundary or the future constituency of Kootenay West — people who are very resilient, people who know that government is not there to do everything for them but who believe that government should be there to work with them, to support them when it's needed and to protect the natural resources of our province.

I believe that there are a number of key issues in our area that people had hoped would be addressed in this budget, and people were sorely disappointed. It is hard to know where to start, but I believe the most hard-hit have been those who rely on the forest industry for a living. It isn't just those people and their families who work directly in the industry; it is the many other businesses and services in the area who have felt the cuts as the mills around us have closed.

First we saw the bankruptcy of Pope and Talbot, the

closure of the mills they ran and the sale of that land and of tree farm licence 23. Some local contractors did receive some compensation for the loss of their contracts through those sales, but for the most part, people in the area did not benefit from those sales. We see the short-sighted sale of a resource that should have been utilized by the forest industry for years to come and won't be.

What is even worse is what we have today. We have sawmills that have closed and a pulp mill potentially closing. And why? They need fibre. Can they access it? No. Why not? One of the biggest tree farm licences in the province is right at their back door. Can they access that fibre? No, because this government brought in legislation that allows a company to keep the resources but not utilize them in the area, to keep the trees and not manufacture them in the area, to turn the land into a real estate development or — even worse — to log the trees and export them away from the community and the province.

I toured Springer Creek sawmill last week in the Slocan Valley. I saw an extremely well-run mill that has worked hard to bring in environmentally friendly renovations to ensure that they have a good market. They are struggling — so much so that they've announced an indefinite closure after April 6. They have a market, they have diversified, and they are still struggling, as they can't access fibre.

They showed me the planks they are putting together that are utilized in northern Alberta in the tar sands. The planks are used for roadbuilding instead of pavement. Once the road is finished being utilized, they can either reclaim it to use on another road, or they are left to rot in the bog, which is environmentally friendly. It's an environmentally friendly road, and there are minimal footprints.

Could they continue to provide this resource to the tar sands? Well, of course they can. But without fibre, it's not possible. That is not the fault of the housing market in the United States. No, that is the fault of a policy implemented by this Liberal government.

But did we see much in the budget to help those forest-dependent communities? Nothing — not even any additional funds to help the forest workers who are so desperately in need of a bit of help to tide them over until the economy turns around.

I talked about my grandkids earlier, and this is one thing I want to see change. I want any one of them to be able to have the opportunity to work in the forest industry, if they so choose, when they are raising their own kids. The way things are going today under this Liberal government, I don't see much chance of that happening.

Another worry I have is the ability for my grandkids to be able to still access the waterways, the rivers, streams and creeks in this province as they grow up. With the Liberal policy of selling off all the water licences to the

highest bidder — the corporations that want them and then deny access to the community — I worry. When you see the destruction of pristine wilderness for an independent power project that will only benefit a corporation that will not put any resources back into the community, I worry. Projects that are anything but green or environmentally friendly.

I think I've made it clear that I'm not against independent power projects. In fact, we have one of the best ones in the Kootenays. We have the Columbia Basin Trust and the Columbia Power Corp. The Columbia Basin Trust is an independent power project that gives back to the region, that gives back to the community. It's environmentally sound, and it listens to the people.

It was interesting a few years ago when the Liberal-appointed board thought it would be a good idea to sell off the dams that we own, to sell off our rights and to invest those sales in the stock market. Well, the reaction from the region was quick and concise: not a chance. Thank goodness for the government of the '90s that had the foresight to put policies in place....

Interjection.

K. Conroy: The member opposite can chuckle, but the Columbia Basin Trust and the Columbia Power Corp put policies in place that made sure that the board had to listen to the residents, that the board had to invest in the community and in the region.

[1800]

Imagine what we would have had today if those dams had been sold off and invested in the stock market. We would have lost those investments. They would have been gone, gone with the stock market. Just ask the Northern Development Trust. Maybe the member would like to ask the trust in her own region there: how many millions of dollars did they lose because they invested money in the stock market?

Well, the Columbia Basin Trust didn't do it. They invested it back in the region. They've got people working in the region, and the money comes back. That's an independent power project that works for the region, works for the people and will be there for many years to come for the people of the Kootenays.

But today this government claims to be a new, greener government, approving green hydro energy, neglecting to tell the full story of the creeks being diverted and many, many kilometres of pipes and tunnels underground, never to be returned to the natural waterways, never to be returned back to those creeks or streams. How green is that?

Or offshore drilling. Let's talk about how green that is, how that's going to benefit this province, and then we're going to talk about the punitive measures that have been brought in when they tried to deal with climate change by bringing in a carbon tax.

Now, I know some of you folks on the other side don't get out to rural B.C. much, but here's a news flash. It's really cold in the Kootenays. We need heat to heat our homes. We need oil, and there is minimal, minimal public transportation in the Kootenays. We need our cars and our trucks to get around. You can't see people biking too much. You don't see people biking too much up north in the winter. You don't see people biking too much in the Kootenays in the winter. It's just not possible.

We also have heavy-duty-equipment operators, we have loggers, and we have ranchers who need the gas, the diesel to operate their machines. We need to be able to encourage those people without being penalized, without them having to pay a carbon tax that's going to cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. The pulp mill is a perfect example of an industry struggling to make ends meet, struggling because they can't get fibre, which isn't the fault of the U.S. market. They had to pay over \$600,000 last year in a carbon tax.

They estimate this year that it's going to be over a million dollars for a carbon tax when they're struggling to make sure that they keep operating, that they can keep the plant running so that people can have the jobs and work there. How green is that? What does that do to a community? All it does is hurt a community.

We need to look at ways of bringing in good, healthy, innovative ways to work with people to combat climate change — positive ways that allow people to work with government to ensure change. It's things like retrofitting buildings like schools, hospitals and homes, and implementing things like the green bond to support those initiatives so that people can ensure that they've got funding, so that they can work with their homes, so that they can start at home with green energy.

One of the comments that was made to me when that \$100 came out was: "What am I going to do with it? That's a tankful of gas. That's some new recycling bins, but as for a long-term initiative, you can't replace your oil furnace. You can't replace your windows." We need some long-term initiatives that ensure that you can just take your home and really, truly implement green policies.

One thing that a number of members on the other side of the House have talked about is the issue with immigration and migration out of this province. There are many, many young people who have had to leave our area in the last eight years. Many of them have left for Alberta, where they have got into the apprenticeship programs, where they've gotten their trades.

When you graduate with a trade program in Alberta, you get the entire trade program. You get the Red Seal program. You get a journeyman ticket, where you can go anywhere and work in Canada.

Now, can they do the same thing here in B.C.? Well unfortunately, they can't, because this government has

torn apart what was once the best apprenticeship program in the country. Now you go and you want to be a carpenter, so you're trained to be a framer. When the job is finished — the framing job is finished on the job — well, your job is finished. Where can you go after that? If there's no more framing, you're out of luck. You don't have a full journeyman's ticket, and that is just wrong.

Our youngest son is a journeyman millwright in Fort McMurray. He can't get over the number of people from B.C. who work there, and most of them have moved there in the last eight years — not during the '90s but in the last eight years. The boom from B.C. has been huge, moving to Fort McMurray to work in the last eight years.

[1805]

You know, a number of young people who work for us today came here in the '90s to go to school. They came to this province because they could get a decent education that was at a cost where they could afford it, because post-secondary education in the '90s was affordable, not like today when students are struggling to make ends meet, when institutions are struggling to make ends meet.

We have to return to the days when people could afford to go to post-secondary education. They could afford to go to school. Then I looked at the education part of the budget, and I listened to the teachers and the parents in our communities. They're talking about the struggles of the children in the classrooms, teachers that are faced with large class sizes, teachers that are faced with not enough support in the classroom for the kids who are really challenged that need those extra supports.

These are people who have been teaching for years. These are parents who are talking about the supports their children need. They're not doing it for any other reason than that they care about their kids. They care about the kids in their classroom. They care about their children that need the education, and all they want to see is their kids get the education they deserve.

They don't want to hear about numbers and the stuff that keeps coming up that makes you think, "Jeez, somebody is out of touch with reality," when you talk to the real people in the classroom who know what's going on, who know they're not getting the services.

The health care issues. Well, seniors are still not getting the support they should be getting, neither the home support nor the residential care beds. You know, the government says.... They keep coming up with this jumble of numbers. We know it's a mix of numbers. The Minister of Health likes to talk about the numbers, but they're not residential care beds, and we know that. We know they're a mix of assisted living, supportive housing, and residential care beds.

What does this province need? What do seniors need? They need residential care beds. They need to know that they are in a place where people are trained to work with them, to take care of them. When they're in their senior

years, they should be getting the support that they need.

Hon. G. Abbott: Everybody over 65 should be in one — right?

K. Conroy: I'm not going to agree with the Minister of Health, because we know that's untrue, but we know that people need the support in long-term care facilities.

You know, it was interesting that when our leader gave her response to the throne speech on February 10, she referred to the seniors in this province who were struggling, seniors who were separated and not getting the service they need. It was interesting because....

What was the comment from the member for Surrey-Cloverdale, who is so quick at sending out comments? Like, when we're struggling in rural B.C., we get the boo-hoo. This comment that I found extremely offensive was: "That was four years ago, and it was one couple." Well, even if it was one couple — which it wasn't; there have been many more couples — it is still unacceptable, and it just shows how out of touch that member is and the government is with what's really happening in rural B.C.

I think that it's an arrogance that doesn't understand or want to accept — or maybe it's not an arrogance; maybe it's just sheer ignorance in that they are unwilling to accept — that there are things happening in this province that are very, very real to families. It's very, very real to families when they can't find adequate care, when the only care in a community is privately funded beds, where they don't have \$5,000 or \$6,000 to pay for a privately funded bed to ensure that their parents or grandparents get the care and service they should have.

That, I think, in a province that has the resources it does, is a real crime. In this province, when.... I know that in my communities ten years ago, we didn't talk about homelessness. We never talked about homelessness. It wasn't an issue in our region, and now it is. Now we're talking about homelessness. Now we're talking about homeless shelters, and now we're talking with communities that are saying: "We've got to do something here. We need the support."

Maybe because it's rural B.C. that they're not getting it, but there is something desperately wrong with a province with the resources it has, struggling to provide services to people — something as basic as a roof over your head, something as basic as affordable housing. There's something desperately wrong with that.

I want to talk quickly a bit about some of the issues with my critic area under Labour. We talk to people in this province about the minimum wage and the fact that we have not seen an increase in minimum wage for eight long years. In fact, we saw a decrease to minimum wage, where this government implemented the training wage of \$6 an hour for people. Then, you know, you eventu-

ally got up to \$8 an hour. You can't live anywhere in this province on \$8 an hour.

[1810]

Unfortunately, it's not just teenagers who are working in fast-food places that are making minimum wage. It is single moms with families. It's young couples trying to make ends meet, who are working two and three jobs on minimum wage. You cannot live. It's not a living wage in this province.

We've talked to people. We've talked even to the chamber of commerce in White Rock. The president there admitted that the minimum wage needs to rise. People know. They understand that.

Then, there's the hypocrisy from the Minister of Labour when he says it's okay for the deputies in the government to get incredible wage raises because the government's paying it, but it's not okay for the minimum-wage earners to get a raise because small business is paying it.

Well, it all comes from the same pocket, folks. I mean, it's hypocrisy of the greatest kind that this minister is so out of touch that he doesn't understand or respect the fact that people need an increase to minimum wage.

I'm getting a time-to-wrap-up sign. It's close to the end of the day, I think.

Interjection.

K. Conroy: I have four more minutes. Oh good. I'll take it. Thank you so much, Mr. Minister. That's so kind.

I really want to talk about the actual abandonment of rural B.C. I wanted to talk about the fact that there are people in Salmon Arm that are incredibly concerned about the abandonment of rural B.C. People are saying: "We're not getting our roads fixed." I mean, I get that a lot. "We're not getting the support we should have." The frustration — a \$360 million price tag to put a new roof on B.C. Place when we're not getting services in rural B.C.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

The Minister of Health can mumble, but I know that when we talk to those people, they truly believe in their hearts that there's something desperately wrong when you see cost overruns on projects that are not going to

benefit rural B.C., that are only benefiting very, very few people.

I really, truly feel that it is for that attitude — that abandonment of rural B.C. and the fact that there's nothing in this budget that really supports rural B.C. — that I know that my colleagues and I will not be able to support the budget. With that, I take my place.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with standing orders, it is now time to put the question before the House, which is that the Speaker do now leave the chair for the House to go into Committee of Supply.

[1815]

Motion approved on the following division:

YEAS — 38

Falcon	Reid	Coell
McIntyre	Chong	Christensen
Polak	Bell	Krueger
Bennett	Black	Hogg
Les	Hayer	Lee
Nuraney	Horning	Bloy
Lekstrom	Oppal	de Jong
Campbell	Hansen	Bond
van Dongen	Abbott	Penner
Coleman	Cantelon	Thorpe
Roddick	Sultan	Whittred
Hawes	Yap	MacKay
Richmond		Rustad

NAYS — 22

S. Simpson	McGinn	Farnworth
Ralston	B. Simpson	Wyse
Brar	Thorne	Fraser
Sather	Chudnovsky	Dix
Trevena	Bains	Karagianis
Krog	Coons	Routley
Hammell	Lali	Cubberley
	Conroy	

Hon. M. de Jong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

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Published by British Columbia Hansard Services,
and printed under the authority of the Speaker.

Printing Agent
Crown Publications, Queen's Printer for British Columbia
563 Superior St., Victoria, B.C. V8W 9V7
Toll-Free: 1-800-663-6105 Telephone: (250) 387-6409
Fax: (250) 387-1120 E-mail: crown@crownpub.bc.ca

Rates
Single issue, \$2.85; per calendar year, mailed daily, \$396. GST extra.

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