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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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His Honour the Honourable Steven L. Point, OBC

**SECOND SESSION, 39TH PARLIAMENT**

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2010

The House met at 1:34 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

### Routine Business

Prayers.

### Introductions by Members

**R. Cantelon:** I'd ask this House to help me welcome a new young lady not into this chamber but indeed into this world. Last Saturday at around 8:30 my son and daughter-in-law, Tamara and Kevin Cantelon, welcomed Elianna Rae Cantelon into this world. I'm a proud grandfather, and I thank you all in wishing them well.

**Hon. M. Stilwell:** I rise today to introduce four special guests in the gallery: my mother, Reva Stilwell, here from Calgary for the first time; my cousin Dr. Lisa Sheinin, a child psychiatrist who practises in Toronto, with her two children, Elka and Jonah, who study Mandarin and French in Toronto. Would the House please make them welcome.

[1335]

**K. Conroy:** I'd like to introduce two people to the House today. Lorne Burkart is a lobby coordinator for the West Kootenay region with the BCNU. With him is one of his colleagues, Christine Sorenson, who is from Kamloops. Would the House please join me in making them welcome.

**S. Herbert:** I rise to acknowledge Diana Searle and a number of other arts advocates who are here today to urge us to reinvest in arts and culture in B.C.

### Tabling Documents

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have the honour to present the Auditor General's report 7, 2009-2010, *The PARIS System for Community Care Services: Access and Security*.

### Statements (Standing Order 25B)

#### OLYMPIC GAMES EVENTS AND LEGACY IN RICHMOND

**L. Reid:** I had the absolute pleasure on July 2, 2003, to be in the audience when Vancouver was announced as the host city for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Our province is prepared for the games to begin. Last night I again had the pleasure of experiencing the excitement that these Olympics have brought to Richmond. It was exhilarating to stand with 15,000 British Columbians cheering under a gorgeous night sky to await the arrival of the Olympic torch. The singing of *O Canada* was spectacular.

When the Richmond Oval opened just over two years ago, it became a source of pride. Teams from all over the world have skated and competed in the oval, giving many locals the opportunity of seeing world-class athletes at their best. Richmond and the oval are the centre of these games, and the region has never been more prepared or excited. The Olympics have already created a legacy in the community, much of which was shown last night during the torch relay and celebration.

Our local hero, the Man in Motion, Rick Hansen, brought the torch into the O Zone and lit the community cauldron. I know we'll be watching our televisions and cheering loudly for our very own Alexa Loo, when she snowboards to the podium in the giant slalom on February 26.

With the introduction of the new Canada Line to the city of Richmond, it is clear that the region is excited and prepared for what lies ahead. We are the gateway to economic activity in British Columbia. The 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games are a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and Richmond will hold on to this legacy. We are ready to welcome the world.

### NORMAN GAGATEK

**N. Macdonald:** A year and a half ago, at the age of 39, a devastating brain stem stroke changed Norm Gagatek's life forever. Norman had a young family. In fact, Norman's partner, Kim, was pregnant with their second child. After the stroke Kim was told that there was little hope for Norman's recovery, that Norman would never return home. But there was no way that this family was going to give up that easily.

As a volunteer firefighter and active community volunteer, Norman had the support of the whole Columbia Valley. Firefighters held fundraisers and advocated for Norman to receive the health care services he needed. "We're not giving up on Norman" was their motto.

Last month Norman Gagatek began intensive rehabilitation at the Halvar Jonson Centre for Brain Injury in Ponoka, Alberta. His progress, now that he is receiving the care he needs, has been remarkable. When I last saw Norman, he was able to communicate only through shaking his head and blinking with his eyes. That was before Christmas. Today he's initiating simple conversation, he's sitting in a chair, and he's learning to swallow again.

For Kim and their sons, there is real hope that Norm can continue to receive the rehabilitation he needs and that he will be able to return home to his family. The province

has committed to three months of funding for Norman's rehabilitation in Ponoka. Norm, Kim and their children need the assurance that this funding will continue.

Later I'll be presenting petitions from firefighters across the Columbia Valley asking the government to do what they must to keep Norman's rehabilitation progressing.

To Norman and his family, I know I speak for all members of the House when I say: we honour your strength, your determination, and we look forward to the day when your fellow firefighters and your neighbours welcome you back to the Columbia Valley and to your home in Invermere.

[1340]

#### SCOUT-GUIDE WEEK AND OLYMPIC GAMES

**H. Bloy:** Since the Olympic torch left Victoria on October 30, it has travelled nearly 45,000 kilometres and visited over 1,000 communities. The 12,000 torchbearers, including hundreds of Scouts and Guides from across Canada, have braved the rain, the wind, the snow and sub-zero temperatures to get the torch to B.C. Place on February 12, where thousands of Scouts and Guides have volunteered for the opening and closing ceremonies — and everything else in between — from coast to coast in Canada.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognize Scout-Guide Week, which will take place while the Olympics are on. This week is a celebration of both Scouts Canada and Girl Guides of Canada when the organizations come together in the spirit of friendship to honour their shared heritage. It is also a chance for the public to appreciate and recognize the endless potential of our Canadian youth in the steps they are taking in scouting and guiding that will transform them into our nation's future leaders.

Scouting and guiding instil lifelong skills and values of leadership, honour, hard work and teamwork through various outdoor programs. In fact, all of these qualities will be exemplified in Vancouver and Whistler in two days at the 2010 Olympic Games. This year Scout-Guide Week comes at a very unique time. As they celebrate across the province, Guides and Scouts will be able to look to the games and our athletes for inspiration.

I ask the members of this House to join me in wishing Scouts Canada and Girl Guides of Canada a great week and also to join me in wishing all of our Olympic athletes the best of luck at the Vancouver 2010 Olympic Games. Go, Canada, go!

#### ROSSLAND WINTER CARNIVAL

**K. Conroy:** On January 22 to 24, the Rossland Winter Carnival, Canada's longest-running winter carnival,

marked their 113th year of celebration. This has been a highlight of winter in Rossland since 1880.

Then, Olaus Jeldness pioneered the carnival and kept it successful for many years. He was also a grandfather of skiing in Rossland. Largely as a result of his efforts, the royal sport of skiing was firmly established in the Canadian west. Olaus is still honoured every year at carnival.

The weekend included many activities like old favourites such as the bobsled race down the steep terrain of Spokane Street — the entire street is closed off and becomes the run — the torch light parade down Red Mountain and the kids carnival.

Added excitement was the participation of CBC's Rick Mercer in the bobsled race. He was quite a crowd pleaser, even if his sled didn't win.

This year the carnival included the Olympic Torch Relay as part of their celebrations. Folks were asked to be part of Olympic history and celebrate Rossland's history of skiing by dressing in retro and historic ski gear.

In keeping with the Olympic spirit, there were closing ceremonies complete with entertainment and podium medal presentations on Sunday afternoon. I was happy to be able to award the medals to the winners of the various events wearing a coat from the '88 Calgary Olympics opening ceremonies — a long red coat with cowboy tassels that some of you might remember.

There were many, many people involved in the organization of this three-day event, too many to mention them all in this two-minute statement. However, I do want to acknowledge some of the hard-working carnival committee members, including Kelly Atcheson, Caroline Rousselle, Anna Caron, Richard Reid, Mary Amantea, Nathalie Levasseur, Dan Loukras, Jonathan Provencal, Greg Thatcher, Pete Gearin, Carol Enns, Ali Grubisic, Tyler Merringer, Lisa Henderson, Ben Spiller, Tara Kowalchuk, who works part-time for the festival, and Deanna Steven from Tourism Rossland, who all coordinated together to put on a great time in the true spirit of Rossland's celebration.

#### LUNAR NEW YEAR AND OLYMPIC GAMES

**R. Lee:** This month will be a very exciting time for B.C. as we prepare to celebrate two great events. The first begins on February 12, and you may have heard of it — the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympic Games. The second, lunar new year, begins just two days later on February 14. Both of these events unite billions of people around the world in celebration.

Every year in the Chinese calendar is associated with a different animal, and it's very interesting, with the Olympics around the corner, that the approaching lunar new year will usher in the year of the golden tiger. The tiger is associated with being active, seizing opportunities and reaching our highest potential, which is exactly what our fine Canadian athletes are about to do.

Tigers love to win and cannot pass up a challenge — a perfect description of our Olympians. Tigers seem calm, but their fire shows when they compete, and we shall see this cool calm from our athletes right up to the moment they show their fires in the heat of competition.

[1345]

It's also interesting to note that the colours most important during lunar new year, red and gold, are also colours we will see a lot during the Olympics. Red is the colour we use to show our support for Canadian athletes. Of course, gold is the colour of the medals that many of them will win in our drive to own the podium.

In honour of these two great occasions, I say, *xin nian kuai le, gung hay fat choy*, and go, Canada, go!

#### OLYMPIC GAMES PARTICIPATION BY B.C. ATHLETES AND COMMUNITIES

**K. Corrigan:** On behalf of the New Democrat caucus, I would like to wish each and every one of the 35 athletes from British Columbia and the rest of the Canadian team and, in fact, athletes from around the world the performance of their lifetimes in the Olympics, which will be starting in just two days.

You have reached the pinnacle of athletic achievement. The eyes of the world are on you here, but only because you spent so many months and years away from the spotlight, training countless hours, often giving up other opportunities in order that you can be the best of the best.

Communities across this province have celebrated the Olympics with torch relay events. At those events, we have expressed our community pride and our excitement. I am looking forward to torch relay events in my own community tomorrow. Students and residents from around the school district will be treated to fabulous entertainment, including a performance by Marlborough Elementary School of their Olympic song, as well as Buckingham Elementary School's choir and the wonderful Burnaby North Marching Band.

I want to express gratitude to the thousands of British Columbians who are volunteering for the Olympics — people like my neighbour Terry, who was pretty happy to find out that his duties were to drive hockey players and their families around. Thanks for giving up so much of your time to make this event a great success. The volunteers will be our front-line ambassadors of Canadian friendliness, and you will do us proud because we all know that Canadians are some of the friendliest people in the world.

As British Columbians we'll go out of our way to make our international guests feel welcome and at home. It is like us to go that extra step to ask someone looking perplexed at a map if he can help them or to strike up a casual conversation in a lineup or at an event. These small gestures are the ones that will help form the lasting impressions of British Columbia and Canada.

I also hope that we will, given the opportunity, let people know about why our province is so great — not just the beautiful, if overly green, vistas but the things we are so collectively proud of that set us apart, things like our public services, health care and education, that we believe in equality, the....

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Member.

#### Oral Questions

##### FUNDING FOR EDUCATION

**C. James:** It's just been one day since the government said in its throne speech that it cares about B.C.'s kids, and the real B.C. Liberal agenda for education is already becoming apparent. This morning the Minister of Education indicated there are more cuts to come — more cuts during a time when school districts in Prince George, Kamloops, Victoria, Cariboo-Chilcotin, Surrey and across this province are facing huge budget deficits and are being forced to make cuts. Kamloops-Thompson school district alone is facing a deficit of \$3.7 million.

My question is to the Minister of Education. Where exactly does government plan to trim the fat when it's clear that it has already cut the budget to the bone, and how does cutting programs for kids match up with the Liberal promise that they'll renew and revitalize education?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** I would like to start by saying how pleased I am to be back in the House, how very much I appreciate the support that I felt from both sides of the House while I was extremely ill, and how appreciative I am for all of you as well as my family and the excellent health care system.

[1350]

Turning my attention to education, I have been away for a while, but the facts haven't changed. We've invested this year in education over \$4.5 billion.

Just to review the facts, we increased education funding last year by \$84 million. This is in spite of the fact that since 2001 we have 56,000 fewer students in classrooms around this province, a reality of the demographics of the province and something that none of us can do anything about.

In terms of the throne speech yesterday, government is doing what government is obliged to do. We are accountable. What we need to do, if there are administrative savings to be found — and we believe there are — is look for them. Why are we doing that? It's because we want to support students in the classroom.

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

**C. James:** I want the minister to listen to what parents, teachers and support staff in the Kamloops-Thompson school district have been saying. This was a letter sent to the Minister of Education.

"Our public education system can no longer sustain this chronic underfunding and instability. School districts are already reeling from the B.C. Liberal cuts, and they'll be hurting from new underfunded cuts, like pressures with increases in MSP premiums."

Again, my question is to the minister. How does making cuts to education support kids and their future in British Columbia?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** Again, let's talk about how we have funded education. Every single year the funding for education has increased. It has not been cut. It has not been reduced. In spite of the fact that there are fewer students, there has been more funding every year.

I have to say, after touring schools recently in the Kootenays, that I've come away with an increased pride in our system. We have an excellent education system that is meeting needs of students. There is excellence to be seen everywhere in the province. The investments really speak for themselves — increased funding year after year, increased programs, \$43 million this year in StrongStart B.C. centres that are making a difference around this province.

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

**C. James:** The people who work in our education system are doing an excellent job. It's the government that's not providing any support to the people in the education system that's the problem.

Let's just take a look at this last budget. The government cut annual facility grants. They made cuts to transportation. They made cuts to parent advisory council grants, to school sports. They also downloaded costs onto school districts for things like increases in medical services premiums, with no funds to be able to manage.

The minister's statement today shows that she clearly doesn't get the pressures in the system. It's the B.C. Liberals' poor planning and off-loading of costs that have caused the kind of problem that we're seeing. In fact, it's gone so far that one school district is actually looking at presenting a deficit budget as well as closures of rural schools. The Cariboo-Chilcotin region has been pushed into a corner by this government, and other school districts may follow.

Again, my question is to the minister. Will she stand up today and say to the people in the education system and, most importantly, to the children in British Columbia that there will not be further cuts to our education system?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** This government's commitment to education could not be clearer.

Interjections.

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

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** At a time when governments around the world are struggling, and indeed some of them have made cuts, this government has increased funding to education year over year — as I've said, \$83 million of further funding this year in spite of declined enrolment.

[1355]

This year we're investing in StrongStart B.C. centres, and we have restated our intent in the throne speech to begin full-day kindergarten. Next year 21,000 students, or at least their parents, are very much looking forward — some of the students are, as well — to full-day kindergarten, which will be offered in school districts around this province. We are investing, we're continuing to invest, and we made that clear in the throne speech yesterday.

#### FUNDING FOR PRINCE GEORGE SCHOOL DISTRICT

**R. Austin:** Kamloops-Thompson isn't the only region raising these concerns. Here's what a letter from the Prince George school district says: "...either the ministry does not want, or know how, to communicate, or worse, that there is an underlying agenda to set boards up to fail..."

The Prince George school district is faced with a \$2.3 million shortfall and the possibility of closing several schools. They've had enough of this government's doublespeak on education, and they are frustrated by the government's lack of responsiveness.

To the minister: will she be upfront with school districts like Prince George about how exactly she plans to find savings in a system that's been gutted by cuts and saddled with unfunded costs?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** I must reiterate that an increase in a budget of over \$1.3 billion since 2001 is not a cut — \$1.3 billion.

With respect to Prince George, I certainly recognize and we all recognize that thinking about closing schools is a very difficult decision. Prince George is a good example of just how difficult the demographic challenges can be. This is a school district that had 18,000 students and has over 4,500 fewer students now. It does mean changes in that school district; there is no question. But Prince George has....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** Prince George has an increase in their per-pupil funding of over \$2,000. This is also a school district that receives over \$5.6 million annually for its unique challenges. So we are providing support and working with the school district.

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

**R. Austin:** Here's what the Prince George school district says: "In our view, your ministry has not met its obligation to provide the communication that is essential for boards to succeed, nor has your ministry been forthright in its presentation to the public...."

It's precisely this kind of failure to communicate that's hurting communities like Prince George — sudden cancellation of funding grants, hitting school districts with unfunded costs without notice and expecting school districts to implement the government's ideas without a plan in place. That, Mr. Speaker, all hurts kids.

To the minister: B.C.'s children, parents and education partners have had enough of this government's broken promises and lack of planning. Will the B.C. Liberals today, ahead of the budget, commit to resolving the mess that they've caused and move on with fixing a system that's badly broken?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** As I've said, the Prince George school district is one that is under particular challenges because of their enrolment decline. We have continued to invest in this school district. We've invested, since 2001, more than \$14 million in this school district for projects that include the new Valemount Secondary School. Investments are ongoing — new StrongStart B.C. centres. Certainly I know that Prince George is planning for the implementation of full-day kindergarten with excitement and enthusiasm. We are making these investments.

[1400]

One of the things that I'm actually the proudest of — and it isn't just for Prince George, but it's for the whole province — is the commitment that we have made to early learning. We know from research that one of the best places we can invest is in early learning, in full-day kindergarten and in the planned learning....

I have to say that as we prepare to welcome the world to British Columbia, I will certainly be talking about how proud I am of our excellent education system.

#### FUNDING FOR SURREY SCHOOL DISTRICT

**H. Bains:** The minister talks about declining enrolment being the cause of her cuts in the school systems, but here I'll give you an example of how wrong she is.

Schools in Surrey are overflowing, and yet the district is facing the prospect of a shortfall of \$19 million — \$19 million. The district has grown by over 2,700 students

since 2005-2006. This year alone 1,100 new students are entering our school district. So much for declining enrolment as the reason for their incompetency. A growing district laying off teachers in Surrey — a growing district that has seen no new capital funding since 2005-2006 to increase the classroom capacity.

My question to the minister is this. Why should students in Surrey pay the price for her incompetence and this government's neglect?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** While almost all of the school districts in this province do face a demographic challenge, which is reduced numbers, the member is correct — Surrey is one of the few areas where enrolment has expanded.

But when the member opposite speaks about cuts, we have not cut any school district's budget. Even those who have reduced enrolment are protected with funding protection. But in the case of Surrey, enrolment is higher, and this district is receiving \$17.8 million more in funding this year than they did last year.

**J. Brar:** The time has come to give this government a gold medal for their record of broken promises and of deep funding cuts to the kids' programs in British Columbia. The people of British Columbia don't believe this government, and they don't believe this minister.

The people of Surrey see the portables lined up beside the schools — 20 new portables this year alone — each one at a cost of \$100,000 — money that is taken from per-pupil funding, taken from our children because of this government's mismanagement of the education system.

My question, again to the Minister of Education: when will this government take responsibility for the mess they have created in school districts across the province?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** Again, maybe one last time, we have not reduced funding. We have increased funding year after year after year. This year there will be \$1.3 billion more spent than there was in 2001.

We're investing in CommunityLINK program, we're investing in StrongStart B.C. programs, and next year we will be investing in full-day kindergarten, which is an exciting prospect that we all look forward to. We continue with these investments.

[1405]

In terms of investments that we've made just in Surrey, seismic upgrades, new schools. These investments have happened. This year alone in this province we have spent \$454 million in new schools, in seismic upgrades and in renovations of schools.

**S. Hammell:** This is all about downloads and double-speak. Schools in Surrey are being asked to pick up a tab

for millions and millions of dollars in unfunded costs that are a direct consequence of this government's decisions. This government negotiated a settlement with the teachers and left the school boards to pick up the bill. This government legislated ever-increasing costs in the carbon tax for our growing district. This government has increased MSP premiums to the tune of over a quarter of a million dollars.

The real consequences of this government's decisions will be layoffs and fewer support staff in our schools. How will fewer teachers and fewer support staff working with our children provide "an unequivocally great education"?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** Again, I would say in Surrey in particular what's happening. In Surrey the funding has not been reduced. They are receiving over \$17 million more in funding this year than they did last year. This is not a decrease. This is an increase.

I've talked about the different areas we're funding in Surrey. I'd really like to speak more generally about why we're looking for administrative savings.

I've spent time in classrooms in these last few weeks, and what I've seen there is students who are the future of this province. I've seen kindergarten students who are working on science projects. I had the opportunity to meet with students at the Mount Sentinel Secondary School who'd just come back from Haiti — an inspiring group of students.

It doesn't matter where I go in this province. I understand why we're continuing to invest in this. This is the future of our province. That's why we are continuing to increase the investment, continuing with developing early childhood education, and we will keep doing that.

#### SCHOOL DISTRICT COSTS AND FUNDING

**R. Fleming:** Victoria schools have unfunded cost pressures totalling nearly \$5 million this year. The minister just said in this House that there are no cuts when six months ago she stood in this very House, tabled a budget that included a cut of \$110 million for facilities grants for every school in British Columbia.

That was a grant program to green schools and conserve energy. Now she's forcing districts to take classroom resources and use them to pay for carbon offsets. That's not good for education, and it's not going to green our schools.

What the minister's actions will do is hurt our children's education with teacher layoffs and possible school closures in my district. The minister knows this. She knows this because she breaks her own law on classroom size every year.

Why does she keep coming to this place? Why does she tell parents and school superintendents that they're wrong? Why does she keep adding more and more unfunded costs on to our boards of education?

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** I certainly would like to let the member know that he is, in fact, mistaken. In Victoria, while they have 14 percent fewer students than they did in 2001, their district has had increased funding. They have \$1 million more funding just in the last year alone than they did in the previous year.

Their per-pupil funding is \$1,500 higher than it was in 2001. That is clearly an increase in funding that's gone to this school district.

[1410]

We are continuing to invest in students. There's no question, in spite of what the members opposite would have the public believe. What really concerns me is the effort to undermine confidence in this wonderful education system that we have...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Continue, Minister.

**Hon. M. MacDiarmid:** ...that students and parents should be confident and feel proud of. We have accomplishments, when our students are tested internationally and nationally, where we place at the top or near the top for the entire world.

#### SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

**M. Karagianis:** Organizations that provide front-line services to the Ministry of Children and Families right across the province received letters in late January outlining budget cuts coming on April 1, 2010. I'd like to ask the minister: what services are being cut?

**Hon. M. Polak:** First and foremost, I want to advise the member that we are very proud of the fact that not only is our budget this year approximately \$1.4 billion but that that represents an increase of about \$400 million since 2001.

We are currently engaged in a very thorough and comprehensive consultation process, working together with our contracted agencies so that we're not dealing with across-the-board cuts but finding those ways in which we can save the funds we need to manage our budget while protecting front-line services, aboriginal agencies, child and youth with special needs services and, also, maintenance payments and other supports to foster parents.

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

**M. Karagianis:** Well, these letters were sent all over the province — the northern region, the Interior, Vancouver Island — and they include lines such as: "It's no longer possible to meet our fiscal targets for 2010-11," "We're not able to meet cost pressures," "We must find

savings through efficiencies and through service reductions," "Residential services are in scope for review and potential cost reductions."

I would like to again ask the minister to supply us with a list of exactly what services are being cut that affect families across this province.

**Hon. M. Polak:** I'm glad that the member acknowledges that this memo, this information, was sent around all across the province, because that's the idea. We are working with our contracted agencies to determine....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

Minister, just take your seat for a second.

Continue, Minister.

**Hon. M. Polak:** We are working in consultation with our contracted agencies across the province. We are doing that because we know that they, along with us, see the priority to protect critical front-line services, aboriginal agencies, children and youth with special needs services and those services to foster parents and their maintenance supports — all of which have been agreed to with our contracted agencies as out of scope of review. I am proud of that consultative work that is the most transparent process that has ever taken place in our ministry.

#### GOVERNMENT HANDLING OF PERSONAL INFORMATION PRIVACY BREACH

**D. Routley:** After the theft of 1,400 personal files of some of the most vulnerable British Columbians, it took this government seven months to even notify those affected, and then only because the media found out. The acting Privacy Commissioner has released a report which has described the responsibility of this government, and this minister in particular, as a failure to meet the obligations of the law.

To the Minister of Citizens' Services: when will he end this mismanagement and bring some credibility to his file?

**Hon. B. Stewart:** First of all, I want to remind everybody in this House that the government of British Columbia takes the matter of privacy very seriously.

[1415]

When it was first found out at my ministry that this issue of missing files had occurred, we immediately launched an investigation that subsequently resulted in two reports...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. B. Stewart:** ...that were tabled on the 29th of January, as promised. In those reports we clearly lay out exactly what matters have to be dealt with in terms of improving the issues around privacy protection within government.

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

**D. Routley:** Well, the government certainly takes seriously restriction of access to information if it's about the government. But when it comes to protecting the personal privacy of British Columbians, it's a different matter.

The minister has pleaded for more time to review the reports through the media. He's asked for three more months to review the recommendations. He's known since October. That's four more months. The RCMP made them aware in April. That's another seven months. Fifteen months is what it takes this minister to do his job.

This minister has done nothing to date. Now we wait three more months. Does the minister take seriously this breach in the privacy of British Columbians?

**Hon. B. Stewart:** I just want, first of all, to highlight that in the reports that were done both by the Privacy Commissioner's office and the chief information officer, the Public Service Agency.... None of the staff that were involved in this did so in bad faith. There may have been missed opportunities. As such, the deputy to the Premier, the head of the public service employees, has indicated that they need and will take 90 days to implement the changes that are recommended in all three of those reports.

**S. Simpson:** This issue really is one of negligence and lack of leadership when it comes to some of our most vulnerable citizens. Mr. Fraser, in his report, said: "I have found that both MCFD and the Ministry of Housing and Social Development failed to adequately secure personal information in their custody and control."

He went on to say: "It is clear, beyond any doubt, that affected individuals should have been notified within days of the April 7, 2009, discovery. A seven-month delay in notification meant that any reasonable opportunity for risk mitigation was lost."

My question to the minister is this. Will he stand up today and apologize to those 1,400 people that his government put at risk, and will he commit to paying any incidental costs that they had in order to protect their security?

**Hon. B. Stewart:** You know, I think the reports are very clear that were missed opportunities. Again, the members of the Public Service Agency did not operate in bad faith. Clearly, the people at the centre of this are

the ones that.... Those particular individuals have been terminated from government, and that has been the result of not only our findings....

The reaction of government is that we need to provide better training. We need to provide better, clearer lines of authority as to how this information gets reported up to the necessary individuals. Ninety days is what the deputy minister has asked for. That's what we're doing to provide extra training and clear lines of authority and looking at....

[End of question period.]

### Motions Without Notice

#### LEGISLATIVE SITTING HOURS

**Hon. M. de Jong:** For members, there are some administrative matters that perhaps we can deal with.

[1420]

Firstly, with respect to hours of sitting, members know that we have a schedule provided for in the standing orders. The sessional order that I have, and I have provided it to my friend the Opposition House Leader, refers to the Wednesdays and Thursdays whereby we would sit, on a sessional basis, on Wednesdays from 1:30 to 7 p.m. and then on Thursdays from 1:30 to 6 p.m. I've provided that motion.

By leave, I move:

[That effective immediately, the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia be amended as follows for the duration of the Second Session of the Thirty-ninth Parliament, which commenced on February 9, 2010:

1. That Standing Order 2(1) is deleted and the following substituted:

#### *Sittings*

##### **Daily sittings.**

2. (1) The time for the ordinary meeting of the House shall, unless otherwise ordered, be as follows:

Monday:	Two distinct sittings: 10 a.m. to 12 noon 1:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Tuesday:	Two distinct sittings: 10 a.m. to 12 noon 1:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.
Wednesday:	1:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.
Thursday:	Two distinct sittings: 10 a.m. to 12 noon 1:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m.

2. That Standing Order 3 be deleted and the following substituted:

##### **Hour of interruption.**

3. If at the hour of 6:30 p.m. on any Monday and Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, and 6:00 p.m. on Thursday, the business of the day is not concluded and no other hour has been agreed on for the next sitting, the Speaker shall leave the Chair:

On Monday	until 10 a.m. Tuesday
On Tuesday	until 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday
On Wednesday	until 10 a.m. on Thursday
On Thursday	until 10 a.m. on Monday

subject to the provisions of Standing Order 2(2)(b).]

Leave granted.

Motion approved.

### Reports from Committees

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Then, Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the first report of the Special Committee of Selection, which met this morning, for the second session of the 39th parliament. I move that the report be taken as read and received.

Motion approved.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** The report, for the information of members, provides for the following select standing committees. I'll read the names of the members into the record.

Select Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs: Don McRae, convener; Donna Barnett; Dr. Terry Lake; John Slater; John Les; Gordon Hogg; Bob Simpson; Harry Lali; Doug Routley; Scott Fraser.

Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth: Joan McIntyre, convener; Marc Dalton; Jane Thornthwaite; Stephanie Cadieux; John Rustad; Douglas Horne; Maurine Karagianis; Leonard Krog; Mable Elmore; Nicholas Simons.

Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations: Ralph Sultan, convener; Harry Bloy; Pat Pimm; Joan McIntyre; Rob Howard; Gordon Hogg; John Horgan; Gary Coons; Harry Bains; Vicki Huntington.

Select Standing Committee on Education: Gordon Hogg, convener; Richard T. Lee; Jane Thornthwaite; Marc Dalton; Dave S. Hayer; Rob Howard; Robin Austin; Diane Thorne; Dawn Black; Michael Sather.

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services: John Les, convener; John van Dongen; Don McRae; Norm Letnick; John Rustad; Jane Thornthwaite; Doug Donaldson; Bruce Ralston; Michelle Mungall; Bill Routley.

Select Standing Committee on Health: Stephanie Cadieux, convener; Ron Cantelon; Dave S. Hayer; Don McRae; Dr. Terry Lake; Donna Barnett; Adrian Dix; Sue Hammell; Jagrup Brar; Raj Chouhan.

Select Standing Committee on Legislative Initiatives: Dr. Terry Lake, convener; Eric Foster; Dave S. Hayer; John Slater; Richard T. Lee; Pat Pimm; Jenny Kwan; Rob Fleming; Mike Farnworth; Katrine Conroy.

Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills: Norm Letnick, convener; Eric Foster; Harry Bloy; Pat Pimm; Donna Barnett; John Slater; Rob Fleming; Mike Farnworth; Jenny Kwan; Katrine Conroy.

Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts: Bruce Ralston, convener; Douglas Horne; John Les; John Rustad; Norm Letnick; Joan McIntyre; Richard T. Lee; Ralph Sultan; Rob Howard; Spencer Herbert; Kathy Corrigan; Lana Popham; Shane Simpson; Guy Gentner; Vicki Huntington.

Special Committee to Appoint an Information and Privacy Commissioner: Stephanie Cadieux, convener; John Les; Rob Howard; Leonard Krog; Doug Routley.

Special Committee to Review the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act: Ron Cantelon, convener; Eric Foster; Douglas Horne; Marc Dalton; Ralph Sultan; Harry Bloy; Stephanie Cadieux; Doug Routley; Harry Lali; Guy Gentner; Katrine Conroy; Jenny Kwan.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I ask leave of the House to permit the moving of a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I move that the report be adopted.

Motion approved.

### Motions Without Notice

**Hon. M. de Jong:** In addition, I ask leave of the House to move three distinct motions to activate the Special Committee to Appoint an Information and Privacy Commissioner, the Special Committee to Review the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is leave granted for all three motions?

Leave granted.

### APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO APPOINT AN INFORMATION AND PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I move:

[That a Special Committee be appointed to select and unanimously recommend to the Legislative Assembly, the appointment of an Information and Privacy Commissioner, pursuant to Section 37 (1) of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (RSBC 1996, c. 165) and that the Special Committee so appointed shall have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and is also empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the committee;
- (b) to sit during any period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient;
- (d) to retain such personnel as required to assist the Committee; and shall report to the House as soon as possible, or following any adjournment, or at the next following Session, as the case may be; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon the resumption of the sitting of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

I have provided a copy of the motion to the Opposition House Leader setting forth the specifics of the assignment.

Motion approved.

### APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE FREEDOM OF INFORMATION AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY ACT

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I move:

[That a Special Committee be appointed to review the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (RSBC 1996 c. 165) pursuant to section 80 of that Act, and that the Special Committee so appointed shall have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and is also empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
- (b) to sit during any period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient;
- (d) to conduct public consultations by any means the Committee considers appropriate, including but not limited to public meetings and electronic means; and
- (e) to retain personnel as required to assist the Committee; and shall report to the House by May 31, 2010; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

Once again, the details of that statutory responsibility are set out in the motion that I have provided to the Opposition House Leader.

Motion approved.

[1425]

### POWERS AND ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH COMMITTEE

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Finally, I move:

[That the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth be appointed to be empowered to foster greater awareness and understanding among legislators and the public of the BC child welfare system, and in particular to:

1. Be the committee that receives and reviews the annual service plan from the Representative for Children and Youth (the "Representative") that includes a statement of goals and identifies specific objectives and performance measures that will be required to exercise the powers and perform the functions and duties of the Representative during the fiscal year;
2. Be the committee to which the Representative reports, at least annually;
3. Refer to the Representative for investigation the critical injury or death of a child; and
4. Receive and consider all reports and plans delivered by the Representative to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon Select Standing Committees of the House, the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth be empowered:

- a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
  - b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
  - c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
  - d) to retain personnel as required to assist the Committee;
- and shall report to the House as soon as possible, or following any adjournment, or at the next following Session, as the case may be; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

Motion approved.

**C. James:** I rise to present a petition.

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed.

### Petitions

**C. James:** This is a petition in support of the arts signed by 2,290 constituents, asking that the cuts to arts funding be reversed and that investment in the arts be on parity with the average of other Canadian provinces.

**S. Herbert:** I, too, rise to present a petition.

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed.

**S. Herbert:** It's a petition in support of the arts calling on this House to reinvest in arts and culture and to return gaming funds to the charities and communities that used to receive them.

**D. Donaldson:** I rise to present a petition.

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed.

**D. Donaldson:** It's a petition with 843 signatures of rural and Victoria constituents, a petition in support of the arts to reverse the cuts to all arts funding as recommended by the Finance Committee.

**B. Simpson:** I rise to present a petition.

**Mr. Speaker:** Proceed.

**B. Simpson:** I present a petition with 224 signatures collected by the Quesnel and District Community Arts Council protesting the cuts, particularly the gaming grant cuts, and asking the government to restore funding as recommended by the Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

**N. Macdonald:** I rise to present a petition on behalf of hundreds and hundreds of people in the Columbia Valley who are petitioning the Minister of Health, letting him know that they're not going to give up on Norman Gagatsek and that they expect that he will get the services that he needs to make a full recovery and return to his family.

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I call debate in response to the throne speech.

### Throne Speech Debate

**D. Horne:** It is with great honour that I move, seconded by the member for Kamloops–North Thompson electoral district, that:

[We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia in session assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious speech which Your Honour has addressed to us at the opening of the present session.]

I am humbled by the opportunity to move this Speech from the Throne and to now stand in my place for the opening of this new session — a momentous time in our province, with only two days before the Olympic cauldron will be lit in Vancouver, British Columbia.

What a tremendous time for all British Columbians as we welcome the world to our province, a place that each of us knows so well, though sometimes we forget how lucky we are to call British Columbia home. We are fortunate to enjoy all of the advantages that come from living here — the magnificent scenery and the people from all over the world that we share our lives with, the people that we call our neighbours, our friends. This is truly a very special place that we all live.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

This has been magnified further by the excitement that is building with the Olympic flame as it snakes through our country and our province, coming within driving distance of over 90 percent of our population.

These games showcase British Columbia, but they belong to all Canadians. Nothing has brought this closer together in recent history than the Olympic torch.

I was standing on the front lawn outside this Legislature when the flame first arrived, and the sense of pride in our community, province and country was overwhelming. I can say that the show was incredible.

[1430]

As those ads on CTV often ask, do you believe? While standing there on the lawn with thousands of people witnessing the incredible energy, it was clear that we do believe. We believe that B.C. is the best place on earth, and we believe that we are going to be hearing our national anthem many, many times in B.C.

Place and at Whistler as our athletes stand on top of the podium.

Tomorrow the flame will be in my home community of Coquitlam, and I can tell you the people there are excited. We have 88 people from the Tri-Cities who have either carried the flame or will soon carry it.

I spoke to one of them the other day, Tony Prophet, a renowned local musician who has been on many stages and performed many times before large audiences. He said simply that the emotion he felt as he carried the flame was something he had never felt before and that carrying the flame up the stairs of the Fernie city hall is something he will never forget. I am certain this is true for the hundreds of others that have joined in this wonderful honour.

The Olympic flame is a symbol that pulls us all together, a symbol of peace and a call to bring the world together. It is a symbol of the celebration of excellence, a drive to truly be the best.

The world is coming — the athletes, coaches and the judges, and the international media who will broadcast our stories to the world. Then there will be the many business leaders, heads of state and elected officials from many, many countries throughout the world.

I heard, the other day, one of the local media outlets claiming that the sole potential economic benefit of the games would be in increased tourism. As always, they were casting doubt on that potential. While undoubtedly the hundreds of millions of dollars in free advertising that our province will receive from the international media will indeed reap considerable reward for our tourism sector, the premise of this argument that the games will only benefit tourism is fundamentally flawed. Unfortunately, it has been so often repeated that there's no wonder there remains a question as to the benefit of our hosting the games.

I can tell you that throughout my life more deals have been done over lunch or dinner or at a hockey game, at a basketball game, on a boat, than I've ever completed sitting in a boardroom. Life and business is about relationships, building bonds, building familiarity and building trust.

In no part of the world is that more true than in Asia — where I've done considerable business — a part of the world that we need to cultivate not only to increase our exports of wood, which is extremely important to our economy, but also of our knowledge-based economy. British Columbia is not only rich with natural resources; we have a wealth of significant knowledge and expertise in many, many areas.

Before I entered politics, my company was extremely involved with the design and production of the 3-D venue images for the Sochi 2014 Olympic bid. I can tell you that while I did not meet Mr. Chernyshenko — the John Furlong of Sochi 2014 — in Torino or complete a deal there, the contacts that I made and the relationships

that I built attending the events in Torino allowed me to build significant success and allowed me to win the business in Russia.

On the alpine venues our technical partner was Ecosign, based in Whistler, British Columbia. They're regarded as the top alpine venue design firm in the world by most. We in British Columbia have many, many Ecosigns competing and winning international business in many sectors.

During the games I plan to work very hard to introduce my Russian friends to the many new friends that I will meet, to the huge array of experience that we have built to stage these games and the vast array of talent that we have here in British Columbia. I will make no apology for using every opportunity to build relationships, build trust, talk about the benefits of doing business in our province and let them know how much our people have to offer.

In fact, the opposition continues to pursue such a petty line of questioning. It's simply sad. Their Olympic critic even stooped to silly name-calling of an Olympic sponsor, Jet Set Sports, which has been involved in the Olympic movement for many years, including being involved at Salt Lake City and Torino and sponsoring many international Olympic teams. They've contributed millions of dollars to our games here in Vancouver as well.

Jet Set Sports also recently stepped up to make sure that the families being sent to the games by Make-A-Wish Foundation would have accommodation, after the cruise ship they had booked was cancelled.

[1435]

While the member opposite may have been confused by their role in the past, now she is aware of the truth. I believe that member owes this fine company an apology. Maybe she could do it when she's attending the Olympics with her husband, who doesn't have a problem with the free tickets, as he calls them.

But the comments from a side.... I can tell you that they won't be using Burnaby's tickets for anything more than fun and relaxation. The fact that they continue to ask about Olympic tickets just proves that the NDP simply don't get it.

As well, it proves how little they understand about business and economic development and about being a gracious host. I feel sad for the people they represent, as they will squander such an incredible opportunity to promote their local communities. It's like inviting a client to dinner and then telling your family to sit in the driveway while your special guests enjoy a meal. Now, that's hospitality, NDP-style.

I can tell you one thing for sure: our government is firmly behind the Olympics. We get it, we understand the opportunity, we represent all British Columbians, and we will not squander this opportunity.

I'll give you an example. My friend the member for Comox Valley continues to work tirelessly with the

economic development team there and has been tremendously successful to date. In the short term not only have they attracted many athletes to Mount Washington for training, but they've also had an exhibition women's hockey game there. As I've said before, this building of relationships, building bonds.... They will lead business and success for their community.

The other reason that our province will be successful in attracting business is our province's commitment to ensure that we keep taxes low and reduce red tape. The corporation tax was eliminated, and we will eliminate small business income taxes by 2012. Taxes for individuals are down significantly since our government took office in 2001 as well.

Despite the Leader of the Opposition and "It doesn't work to make tax cuts," we today have the lowest personal income tax rates for individual taxpayers on income up to \$118,000, and the second-lowest top marginal rate. Some 325,000 low-income British Columbians now pay no provincial sales taxes whatsoever.

We have increased the basic personal tax amount credit by \$1,627 to \$11,000, effective January 1, 2010. In addition, the spouse or equivalent-to-spouse credit will increase by \$1,627 above the 2009 amounts.

For those making more than the basic personal exemption, since 2001 provincial income taxes have decreased by 37 percent. While that sounds impressive, for many it's not tangible, so let me illustrate exactly what that means. It means \$403 less taxes for those earning \$15,000. It means \$691 less for those earning \$20,000. It means \$1,049 less taxes for those earning \$40,000. It means \$1,457 less for those earning \$50,000, \$1,877 less for those earning \$60,000 and \$2,297 less for those earning \$70,000 a year.

Even with these tax cuts, we have built an economy that allowed us to increase spending significantly, spending on the services that British Columbians care about most: health care and education. We have increased total spending on health care by 70 percent since 2000-2001 from \$9.4 billion to \$15.9 billion this year.

Funding for health authorities will be increasing by approximately 20 percent over the next three years, despite the world being in the worst recession in 27 years. That being said, we still have pressures, and our health authorities are working hard to make sure that the services British Columbians require and deserve are available. They are getting more dollars to do that, but they need to make tough decisions.

We've also committed to renovate and expand B.C.'s Children's Hospital and to build B.C.'s first new regional hospital in more than three decades, the new 300-bed Abbotsford Regional Hospital and Cancer Centre — which, I have to say, is a tremendous facility.

[1440]

We've doubled the number of medical school spaces in B.C. from 128 in 2001 to 256 today. We've added new

medical programs at UNBC and UVic, and we're creating a new program at UBC Okanagan. With this expansion, we'll be graduating 288 medical doctors a year.

We've doubled the number of nurse-training spaces since 2001, added 25 new nursing programs and granted a record number of nursing degrees, nearly 15,000.

We are committed to education. Our funding for K-to-12 education spending is at the highest level ever — \$5.743 billion, a 33 percent increase. This is despite a significant decrease in overall enrolment. We've also increased the per-pupil grant from 2000 by more than 30 percent. Today we have the highest per-pupil funding ever, with an estimated \$8,318 per pupil.

We've expanded our university system by creating seven new universities, providing new opportunities for higher learning closer to home. Since 2001 we've also invested over \$1 billion in literacy programs and services.

As the throne speech recognized yesterday, we as a government recognize the benefits of early learning, and we are committed to providing it through StrongStart B.C. centres and through all-day kindergarten, on a voluntary basis, which will be fully funded.

This throne speech continues to show the leadership and vision that British Columbians expect from our government. We recognize that we must never sit back, must never simply hope that everything will be okay. We are the managers of our destiny, and we need to always be vigilant.

Now, there is no secret to anyone listening that we are living in difficult times. The worldwide economic downturn, even though it began in other countries — although the members opposite try to say otherwise — has nonetheless impacted our province.

In May of last year, against the backdrop of economic uncertainty, the people of British Columbia put their trust and confidence in this government to get our province through these challenging times. The people of British Columbia knew they could rely on this government to provide sound economic management and discipline that is needed to ensure that B.C. will come through this economic crisis stronger than ever so that the core services we all value so deeply can be maintained and made even better.

On May 12, 2009, the people of British Columbia gave this government a mandate to make tough decisions that are necessary in tough times. Well, I don't think there's anyone here that would say we've shied away from those tough decisions. One of the hallmarks of this government is that we are not afraid to make decisions that are unpopular.

This is not a government that sits around and watches the polls, allowing the fickle weather vanes of public opinion to dictate to us what to do. Quite the contrary. We wholeheartedly subscribe to the words of our Premier: "Don't just do what's popular. Do what's right for British Columbia." That's exactly what we're doing.

This throne speech lays out our strategy for more clean energy, more productive relationships with first nations and — my personal favourite portion of the entire throne speech — that we will fix TransLink and get on with the Evergreen line.

We have a vision, and we have a plan. Building infrastructure and a sound economy are pillars of that plan. I know that while the members opposite would like to have something that says "plan" on the front of it for them to realize there is a plan, oftentimes we just get on with moving the province forward. Hosting the Winter Olympics and Paralympics has always been a key element of this strategy and the future, and our plan is working.

Now economists predict that British Columbia will lead the country in growth. According to the Conference Board of Canada's winter 2009 provincial outlook: "Fuelled by 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympics, the province will get back on its feet next year. Real GDP will turn around from 0.1 percent drop this year to a nation-leading 4.3 percent, again, in 2010."

I know that some don't agree with our hosting of the games and the benefit they have already brought, are bringing and will bring us long after the closing ceremonies.

[1445]

The Leader of the Opposition is one of these naysayers. On the CBC *Almanac* she stated: "I didn't support the government trying to gain the Olympics." But I have pointed out in the past her poor grasp of simple math and economics, how she has often been wrong before. She is wrong now and, when it comes to the Olympics, will be wrong as far as she continues this stance.

The 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games are expected to generate over \$4 billion in economic activity. Include the convention centre expansion, and the resulting economic activity climbs to over \$10 billion. The games and their resulting activity are estimated to create 244,000 jobs.

Independent economists agree that the 2010 Winter Games couldn't be better timed as an effective stimulus to the B.C. economy. The games are being cited as one of the key reasons that the B.C. economy will rebound so strongly this year. It is estimated that 250,000 people will come to Vancouver for the Olympics and Paralympics, and the expected worldwide TV viewing audience is over three billion people.

I've stated it before. It's an unprecedented opportunity to showcase and market British Columbia to the world. The Vancouver organizing committee, or VANOC, itself has spent a billion dollars on goods and services in preparing for the games. Today VANOC is spending approximately \$3 million to \$4 million each and every day. To date 78 percent of that spending has gone to B.C. companies.

When the Leader of the Opposition says she's against the games, she is saying that she's against this extraordinary boost to the businesses.

Interjection.

**D. Horne:** She's saying that she doesn't believe that this spending is going to accomplish anything. It's simply wrong. The B.C. businesses are benefiting from the 2010 business opportunities workshop.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, please take your seat.

The Member for Columbia River–Revelstoke, while you're on your feet, I would caution you on your unparliamentary practice. Please continue.

**N. Macdonald:** Okay, thank you. Well, I just point out that the member has not been accurate in quoting another member, and I think that that's problematic, so I would ask the member to withdraw that.

**Deputy Speaker:** I would ask the member to please proceed.

**D. Horne:** B.C. businesses are benefiting from the 2010 business opportunities workshop that helped connect companies to the 2010-related opportunities, and 8,200 business members have taken part in over 230 workshops in every region of the province since 2005.

Indirect spending by sponsors, suppliers, athletic teams and visitors will contribute an additional \$2 billion, and almost surprising to me is that many of these feel that the games will lose money despite these many facts.

There are other facts that really surprise me. I saw a poll the other day that said that 90 percent of British Columbians believe that these games will lose money, and I think that comes from the fact that this is what they continue to hear. This is the message that continues to be reinforced, and it's simply not true.

VANOC sponsorships are surpassing all expectations. VANOC has already exceeded its domestic sponsorship target of \$757 million and dramatically surpassed its broadcast revenue projections. VANOC has sold more tickets than they expected.

John Furlong and his exceptional team at VANOC have done an incredible job, and despite not having Mother Nature's full cooperation, with their superb planning and diligence, the venues are ready. Exceptional. The athletes village is spectacular. The staff and thousands of volunteers are ready, well prepared and excited.

The world is arriving. In two days the 21st winter Olympiad will begin. The spotlight will be on British Columbia, and we will shine. In this great moment in our province's history, we will show the world that British Columbia is truly the best place on earth — the best place to live, the best place to play, the best place to invest and the best place to do business.

When we look back on the 2010 Vancouver Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games, we have absolutely no

doubt that this will mark the beginning of the greatest period of prosperity that our province has ever enjoyed.  
[1450]

When I hear the question, "Do you believe?" I say wholeheartedly: "Yes, I believe in the great future ahead of us." I cannot wait for the games to begin. Go, Canada, go!

**T. Lake:** It is a great honour for me to rise in the House today to second the Speech from the Throne. This throne speech guides the direction of this government in 2010, a year that will undoubtedly be one of our most memorable as we celebrate with the rest of this great country of Canada, and indeed the whole world, the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games.

Three billion people around the globe will focus on Vancouver and British Columbia and will marvel at the performances of athletes who have trained tirelessly, focused intensely and given all of their strength and spirit to their Olympic and Paralympic dreams.

Three billion people will see a province with stunning natural beauty, a resilient economy based on abundant natural and human resources, and a partner in the great Canadian nation that provides endless opportunities for its own people and reaches out to those around the world who need our help.

I'd like to recognize the contributions that Canadians, particularly in my own riding of Kamloops–North Thompson, have made to the relief effort following the devastating earthquake in Haiti. The Haitian people need our support, and I'm proud that Canadians have been among the most generous in providing aid and resources.

The throne speech is a road map for the future of British Columbia. It looks to the future to the province that we want 20 years from now in 2030. This throne speech recognizes that the Olympic and Paralympic Games provide an opportunity to showcase all that British Columbia has to offer. When all is said and done in the days that follow this great event, we need to ensure that we capitalize on this rare opportunity, having the attention of the world. British Columbia will be officially open for business.

I know that the tough decisions, along with the investments we make now, will ensure that we have the capacity to take advantage of every opportunity presented to us in the future and will leave a lasting legacy for our province.

In 20 years we want to be able to look back and say that we did all that we could to build our economy, to maximize our province's strategic advantages as a gateway to the Asia-Pacific, to reach our potential as a green energy powerhouse, to support our families, to invest in our children and to ensure a sustainable health care system.

The Speech from the Throne encourages each one of us to strive harder, reach higher and dream bigger so

that we can make our province even better. In 2010, as we look through the Olympic and Paralympic lens, the desire to achieve great things together is palpable and real.

There has been no better symbol of this collective spirit than the Olympic torch relay that has travelled much of the world, all throughout Canada, and arrived in Kamloops on January 28 — 22 years to the day from the 1988 Calgary Olympic torch. As in every community across the country, large or small, the torch was greeted by extraordinary numbers of people who for one day put aside their problems, their worries and their differences to come together and celebrate as Canadians this special event.

I would like to describe just a few of the people and memorable moments from the torch relay in my community starting, in fact, outside of the riding near Vernon where Kamloops' own Olympian, shot putter Dylan Armstrong, was just as thrilled to lift the torch as he was to represent Canada so well at the 2008 Beijing summer games.

A Kamloops achievement award winner and Thompson Rivers University distinguished alumnus, Jo Berry, is an inspirational Kamloopsian who with a run club has turned people's lives around through the power of movement. Jo and her husband, Adrian, have not only inspired people to better physical and mental health but have developed the Boogie the Bridge fundraising run that has contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to local charitable organizations such as the AIDS Society of Kamloops and organizations that support literacy. Jo was joined by her family and scores of supporters as she proudly carried the torch.

Dr. Ali Zentner, a physician from Vancouver who specializes in treating metabolic syndrome, ran for her friends, family and patients, and told the local newspaper that you have to be a huge cynic not to let this mean the world. The words "opportunity of a lifetime" were repeated again and again by torchbearers like retired neurosurgeon Dr. Gur Singh and Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association president Donna Petrie.

[1455]

As the torch made its way through downtown Kamloops, a crowd of 2,000 was entertained at the Tournament Capital Centre by a stunning live performance entitled "A Meeting of the Waters." This is the translation of the original Tk'emlúps from the Secwepemc language. Written by Janet Deneault and Sherry Bennett, the show featured drummers, dancers, actors, musicians and a cowboy poet to re-enact 500 years of history in the Thompson valleys.

Meanwhile outside at the Hillside Stadium, more than 12,000 people anticipated the arrival of the torch, some wearing their torchbearer outfits from the 1988 Calgary relay with obvious pride.

To no one's surprise, the torch was carried into the stadium by Canada's athlete of the century, Olympic

champion, Senator Nancy Greene-Raine, who has helped transform Sun Peaks into one of North America's premiere ski resorts. The crowd roared as Nancy ran to the top of the stands to light the torch of the final runner of the evening, two-time Stanley Cup champion, Kamloops's own Mark Recchi, our Kamloops athlete of the century.

As Mark made his way onto the stage, children and adults alike reached out to share in the experience, which Mark described as "like game 7, no question." Twelve thousand voices joined the Kamloops children's choir as they sang *O Canada*. Standing there at the cauldron singing our national anthem was the highlight of the evening for me and gave new meaning to the words "with glowing hearts."

I have to give tremendous thanks and recognition to the Kathleen Biagioni, who led the volunteer torch committee and to Tammy Campbell of the city of Kamloops. The hard work they put in with their teams made this spectacular event absolutely, unequivocally successful.

We were fortunate to have the torch in our riding for two days. The next morning the torch restarted its journey early at the sacred arbour of the Tk'emlúps Indian band, where Chief Shane Gottfriedson called the torch a symbol of hard work, determination and success and an inspiration to everyone. Chief Gottfriedson also declared that one day the Kamloops Indian band would produce an Olympic athlete of its own.

Following a prayer by elder and councillor Evelyn Camille, Korah DeWalt, a young student of business at Thompson Rivers University and daughter of Tk'emlúps Indian band councillor Connie Leonard, proudly ran the flame around the arbour.

Hundreds of people lined the streets of north Kamloops, despite the early hour, as the flame made its way out of the city and up the North Thompson Valley to the district of Barriere.

Many will remember the summer of 2003 when Barriere barely escaped huge wildfires that devastated the surrounding forest. The community pulled together then to help those who lost their homes and businesses and has emerged stronger than ever. Infrastructure funding has led to park developments, water system improvements, and despite the economic challenges faced by the forest industry, there is a real sense of optimism in Barriere.

So while the flames of past wildfires are still vivid memories, the flame of the Olympic torch was greeted as tangible recognition of a new tomorrow. Over 700 people gathered to cheer torchbearers like Chris Matthew and then stayed to participate in a mini-Olympics at the Barriere Elementary School.

The torch arrived next in the beautiful community of Clearwater, the gateway to one of British Columbia's natural jewels, Wells Grey Park. Again, over 700 people, or more than one-third of the entire community's popu-

lation, greeted the torch carried by Rachael Elliot while the talented musicians of the Clearwater Secondary School band played onstage.

I then joined more than 50 people in the tiny community of Little Fort as we sent the torch over Highway 24 to the Cariboo, where it continued its journey into B.C.'s rugged and beautiful interior.

We know these scenes have been repeated time after time over the last three months in communities across the country, and it reminds us that we need and appreciate something that lifts us higher, that takes us out of our everyday lives, touches our hearts and brings us together as Canadians. The 2010 Olympic Torch Relay, like its predecessor in Calgary in 1988, will live on in the hearts and in stories that will be retold many times about the day the flame arrived in our community and drew us together like nothing else could.

The Olympic torch has not been alone in generating excitement about the upcoming games in my communities. As Canada's tournament capital, Kamloops has always promoted healthy and active living and has embraced the Olympic spirit in many ways.

[1500]

The Austrian men's downhill ski team has been training at Sun Peaks for the last number of years, and our McArthur Island Sports and Events Centre has been the training ground for the Chinese short-track speed skating team, which was joined this year by teams from the Netherlands and also from Kazakhstan.

Not only are our athletes being showcased at the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, but the stunning glass featured at the Olympic media centre, also known as the Vancouver Trade and Convention Centre, was manufactured at Inland Glass, in Kamloops.

Interjection.

**T. Lake:** That would be in Kamloops.

An accessible Olympic playground built by Beaver Industries using beetle-enhanced ponderosa pine from Kamloops is featured at the Olympics in Whistler. Also, beautiful ponderosa pine from our own city was donated for the Olympic medal podiums.

It was no wonder that the city of Kamloops was named bronze medalist in the GamesTown 2010 Olympic spirit competition, runner-up to those other great interior communities of Dawson Creek and Princeton.

While the Olympic and Paralympic Games have generated excitement and economic activity throughout our region, there's a lot going on as British Columbia turns the corner on the recession.

The Kamloops Airport continues to set record numbers of air travellers, and that's going to continue to grow because of the airport's recent expansion, supported by both levels of government. Kamloops and the North Thompson will truly benefit from expanded air traffic.

That's why this government will continue to encourage the government of Canada to adopt an open skies policy that would add almost \$800 million to B.C.'s economy alone.

Travellers through the Kamloops region include many skiers on their way to Sun Peaks, which has truly become a world-class resort. Sun Peaks has just voted to become B.C.'s newest resort municipality. This will provide responsive local government to the growing community and include a first nation's advisory committee to ensure recognition of traditional uses of the land and to help inform the future development of the resort.

In the North Thompson the district municipalities of Clearwater and Barriere, along with the Simpcw First Nation, conducted an historic community-to-community forum which will lead to the development of a protocol agreement to guide the relationship of the three communities. Simpcw Chief Keith Matthew called the forum historic for the residents of all the communities and just a sign of the times, something we need to do.

We must continue to consult and develop positive working relationships in the Thompson valleys. The government of British Columbia has shown its commitment to these types of partnerships. New revenue-sharing opportunities, new reconciliation agreements and new treaties create social and economic opportunities for aboriginal people that include them in the promise of future prosperity.

The throne speech outlines a path to prosperity for the benefit of all British Columbians, and key to that prosperity is improving our productivity and competitiveness. That means fostering job creation with faster approvals, lowering the cost of doing business, opening up trade and increasing labour mobility.

Adopting an HST is the most important step we are taking to improve the productivity and competitiveness of our economy. The HST will dramatically reduce taxes on business investment by as much as \$1.9 billion and remove over \$2 billion of the cost of doing business in B.C. More than 130 countries, including 29 of the 30 OECD countries, along with five other Canadian provinces, have adopted taxes similar to the HST. It is the right thing to do for the long-term prosperity of our province.

The throne speech also outlines how the government intends to further streamline approval processes. Communities with mining projects in their area, like Clearwater in my riding, deserve a timely approval process to build opportunities. British Columbia will pursue amendments to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act to create a unified federal-provincial review process that will rid unnecessary duplication and costs while encouraging investment and job creation. It really would be much more efficient to have a one-project, one-process approach, with a single framework that is timely, diligent and science-based.

We need to open up opportunities in British Columbia's interior, and this unified approach will be an important step.

It's also worthy of note that the government recognizes that it is important to identify all impediments to doing business across the province, including fairness in property taxes and other barriers to investment, which include zoning, licensing and permitting requirements.

These steps are needed so that our children and grandchildren will have opportunities. They deserve to succeed, and the best investment for the future of the province is to invest in our young people. That's why voluntary full-time kindergarten for five-year-olds will be implemented this September and will be fully funded and in every school by September of 2011.

That's why we've created StrongStart centres in Kamloops, Barriere, Clearwater and across the province. That's why the new neighbourhood learning centres will make sure we're using the resources we currently have to maximize the benefits to our citizens and families, particularly in smaller centres, where schools are often the heart and soul of the community.

The throne speech outlines real, concrete solutions to help families in challenging economic conditions. A new family-with-children property tax deferral option for all B.C. families with children under the age of 18 will ease the financial burden for a lot of families in British Columbia. Now young families will have access to a program that has long benefited seniors and has received many positive comments from citizens and from local governments.

While investing in our families and our children, we must also continue to address challenges faced by the most vulnerable in our society. We continue to make strides in the fight against homelessness in Kamloops, where there has always been a supportive mayor and council as partners with other levels of government.

In the fall I spoke about the newly opened Henry Leland House for supportive housing, and in January the Minister of Housing and Social Development announced the purchase of the notorious Rendezvous Hotel for a supportive shelter for homeless men and women in Kamloops.

The sweet irony is that this previously well-known centre of drug activity will soon provide housing and support services for many of those very people affected by those very drugs.

The provision of affordable housing should not be up to government alone. There are many responsible landlords in Kamloops, many of whom I recently met at a lunch provided by the ASK Wellness Centre that is headed by Bob Hughes. Bob and his team have helped hundreds in Kamloops, and now in Merritt, with issues of drug use, mental and physical health and housing needs. Bob holds a regular meeting with owners of low-cost housing, helping them to deal with the challenges of

the hard-to-house through the sharing of information and resources.

ASK Wellness, along with the John Howard Society, Elizabeth Fry Society and the Canadian Mental Health Association, work cooperatively in our city with faith organizations, with the city of Kamloops, the United Way and the Ministry of Housing and Social Development in a group called Changing the Face of Poverty. I want to thank and commend them for the tremendous work they're doing in our community.

While other provinces and many other countries are only now beginning to address the fiscal challenges of the recent global economic downturn, British Columbia has already demonstrated a responsible philosophy of living within our means to protect critical services, like health care and education, while laying the platform for future investment and economic prosperity.

With the eyes of the world turning this week to British Columbia for the opening of the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympics, this throne speech continues our determination to lead Canada in the 21st century, so we can be at the very front of the line yelling: "Go, Canada, go!"

**N. Macdonald:** As always, it's a pleasure to be able to stand here and address the House on behalf of the communities that I represent. This is the sixth throne speech that I have sat through from this government. If action matches this government's rhetoric, then an awful lot of the important problems that this province has would have been solved long ago. But all too often the disconnect between what is promised in a throne speech and what is actually delivered is massive.

[1510]

Similarly disturbing is the disconnect between what the B.C. Liberals promise during an election and what is actually delivered after the election.

I think if you go back to the election we've just come through, an awful lot of British Columbians would be going and saying that there were four pretty clear things that this government talked about when they went to seek a mandate.

They talked about having no HST, no harmonized sales tax. That was in writing. Yet, again in this throne speech that's referred to as an important initiative of this government — in fact, the most important thing they could do for the economy. Yet they were arguing the exact opposite when they went in front of the people of British Columbia and asked for the right to be government.

The second thing that was really clear during the last election was that the deficit would be limited to less than \$500 million, and yet we know that that's not the case for this past year, for the next year. It is nowhere near that amount. In fact, it's six, seven times that amount.

As well, there were promises to protect the services that we get in public health and public education. Very clearly, that wasn't the case either. So when we listen to

the throne speech and we hear some of the things that are talked about, it's the same look that we have to have at it.

Many members are new to this and forget, or were not aware of, the five great goals. It's really instructive to go back to what was my first throne speech, the five great goals, and just look at them and see what actually flowed after that, because it gives you a good sense of that disconnect between what is said in a throne speech and what this government actually follows through on.

It is over eight years that this government has been in place, and what you saw with the very short throne speech that we had is a government that really has run out of new ideas — ideas about how to deal with the very serious problems that British Columbians face.

We are uniquely fortunate in this province, and I think whenever we go forward, we have to keep the problems that we have here in context. The problems that we have are manageable. There are solutions, but nevertheless, there are real issues that need to be dealt with.

The philosophy that I have, and the philosophy that those that are in the NDP share with me, is the idea that the wisdom of this province sits within the communities and with people on the ground, and that our job is to take that wisdom and bring it into this House and generate policy that is going to reflect the wider wisdom of the people in British Columbia.

Yet what we see is a government that has centralized decision-making and does not share the information in the way that it needs to with the wider population. It does not allow them to participate in the way that they need to. There are real issues that need to be dealt with.

We have a province where more and more children are slipping into poverty. That's a fact that is year after year after year. That poverty ties directly to policy decisions that are made in this House.

It's very easy to stand up and brag about the fact that there are tax cuts. This is something that the wider public embraces, but there are consequences to that. The consequence for this year is that we have a deficit. That deficit is a deficit that you cannot disconnect from the fact that taxes have been lowered. You have taken away some of the tools that taxation allows you to redistribute wealth so that you don't have large parts of your population falling into poverty. That's sound public policy.

Now, it is something that Canada has in the past done quite well — making sure that you don't allow children to fall into poverty. But it's six years in a province with all the wealth, all the potential wealth that British Columbia has, where child poverty is highest in this province.

[1515]

Now, at the end of the speech, in a very strange choice for this government, there was a quotation from Nelson Mandela. Now Nelson Mandela is an incredible individual. I was in Lesotho in the 1980s, '85-'86, and Lesotho was surrounded by South Africa at a time when a picture of

Nelson Mandela was illegal to have in a South African newspaper. To write his name was illegal. What he has accomplished is pretty amazing.

To lift a quotation and to choose to paraphrase what he said and put it into the throne speech just seems particularly inappropriate. I mean, he has a pretty clear set of standards that I think wouldn't synchronize with the direction that this government goes.

One of the things he said that I think is a direct quotation, rather than to paraphrase it, is this: "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way that it treats its children." Now that's a quotation that is exact from Nelson Mandela. When you look at government policy, what you see is — certainly, with the poverty piece — no effort, no sincere effort on behalf of this government to deal with a very real problem.

You have Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, who has called on the Premier — has called on the Leader of the Opposition as well — to meet with her to work together on a poverty plan, asked legislators here to work on dealing on that poverty issue. Yet the Premier will not participate in dealing with that.

We heard nothing in the throne speech that really talks about that issue at all, because it's not a priority for this government. Yet if you're going to quote Nelson Mandela, to be true to what he believes in.... He says very clearly that you have to deal with the issue of child poverty, but year after year I've come to this House and it is never dealt with in a meaningful way. That's fundamentally wrong.

We have issues around children in care, as well, that still lack the solutions that are needed. That ministry, for all of the years that I've been here, is in constant, constant reorganization and unable, too often, to deal with the fundamental issues that they're asked to deal with.

If you look around the province, you have illegal activities that each year play a more significant part in our economy. Yet these are things that weren't even talked about. There was no attempt even to deal with them.

You have collapses in salmon, forest disease and forest health issues that need to be dealt with. You have a deindustrialization of rural British Columbia — 71 manufacturing complexes closed and over 30,000 family-supporting jobs gone.

You also have — and it was talked about in a very fundamental way with this budget — the taking of public wealth and putting it into private hands. Much of what is described as a green energy plan is essentially that. In all of these efforts at privatization, you essentially disenfranchise the vast majority of British Columbians. We see that tendency with this government again and again.

You see it with the health boards, which in no way are accountable to the people who provide the funds for them. There's something wrong with that. You have it with the implementation of independent power projects, where the ability of local government to have a say on

whether they're appropriate for an area or not has been taken away, very deliberately, with Bill 30.

You have bills that have removed the ability of local government to have a say in where resort municipalities go. You have a structure for TransLink that is fundamentally undemocratic. You have structures for B.C. Ferries, BCUC interference. You have a series of actions from this government which remove people from the ability to move on the solutions that they know need to be put forward and put into policy.

In conclusion, you have a government that is beholden to and serves a very narrow corporate interest — I think most British Columbians recognize that — very often to the detriment of the wider public interest. There's something wrong, fundamentally, with that.

[1520]

What I would say is that there are many things that should be done differently. These are the things that I would put forward. I'll keep it to three things, three areas that a government should move forward on to find solutions for the public that we're supposed to serve. I'll just deal with them in terms of themes.

The first theme, the first area of improvement, would be to deal with protection of the commons — these things that the public hold as a common wealth, which has generated wealth for us and for the people of this province for a long time.

There was a time when we would make money from our forests. This is the first time in 50 years where the Ministry of Forests actually cost more than the wealth it generated for the province. We have B.C. Timber Sales, which actually lost money. Any pretence at being proper managers of that resource should be forgotten about.

Let's look at one of the most important commonly held examples of public wealth, which is the Crown land. We are unique as a jurisdiction in that so much of the land in this province is controlled by the public, something that's highly valued in the communities from Kimberley on through Canal Flats, Invermere, Golden and Revelstoke.

People work on the public lands, very often. They go there for recreation. They depend upon it in so many ways. There's a love of the land. There's an expectation that the provincial government is going to be looking after those Crown lands in a way that is respectful of the fact that they're important now and will be important into the future.

Yet what we've seen this government do too often is take away the ability to make decisions on what goes on, on that public land, from the people who live there. It is being done deliberately, and it is being done to the detriment of the wider public good.

In terms of resort development, Jumbo Glacier resort is a proposed resort that for over a decade people in the Invermere area, the Columbia Valley, Kimberley, have found is inappropriate as a project the way it's put forward.

You would think that is a view that would be respected by a government and that people would have the opportunity to express that view and make a decision whether the public lands that are there should be handed over to a developer. But what we have seen consistently from this government are moves behind closed doors to move a project forward despite the fact that the people in the area don't want it.

There's something fundamentally wrong with that. A government should be protecting those common lands, not giving them away — should be respecting what people in the area have to say, not ignoring it or trying to work through, behind closed doors, an objective that really doesn't suit the wider public good.

You also have things like Resource Road Act — concerns about the fact that these are public areas that people expect to have access to. They have access to those areas for hunting, for fishing. These are lands that people feel they should be able to get into and, having paid for the roads, if they are to be open, all people should have access to them. So there are concerns there.

Hunting and fishing opportunities, camping opportunities, forest health issues — all of these are things that the provincial government is responsible for protecting. People know, as those who live in the area, that they have a lot of expertise to offer and should participate in decision-making.

I'll move now to the independent power projects, which is another area that's really very, very contentious. This is an initiative that, let's be clear here, is subsidized heavily by B.C. Hydro, to the tune of almost \$450 million a year. Public money is subsidizing what is going on with these projects.

[1525]

They're guaranteed profits. When they do not get profits, then the minister has a way of reworking the contracts so that they do. What industry is saying — and this is industry that's saying it — is that twice the price is being paid. So I put that forward as something that people find objectionable. They feel that this is our land that's being given away, that they're our rivers and that the value that comes from those areas is value that should go to the wider public. And there's strong feeling that that's not happening with this initiative.

If these projects were good projects, you could come to Kimberley, you could come to Golden, you could come to Revelstoke, and you could explain to the people in the room why they're projects that should be supported. Yet the government deliberately removed the ability of people to make those decisions.

They did that because they knew they could not go to a group of people that understand the land, that understand the trade-offs that you have to make with resource.... You need to remember that the communities we're talking about are mining communities; they're forestry communities. There is no community that knows

more about hydro development than Revelstoke. They understand the trade-offs, but they also know whether it's a good deal or not. We have been removed from the decision-making because we can tell whether it's a good deal or not.

If it was a good deal, you could come there and you could convince people to move ahead. In choosing not to, they admit that they are compromising the common land that we hold as public lands.

Let's talk about one. Because of a federal environmental assessment process and because of very strong action from people in the West Kootenay — and people in Invermere and the Columbia Valley, as well — the Glacier-Howser project has been put on hold. That was a poor project. Certainly they made presentations throughout the Kootenays and didn't convince anybody it was a good project. It was put on hold, and that's good. It's appropriate.

I have to say that the federal environmental assessment program was part of that. The other areas that are a concern are Thompson Falls, Cedar falls....

Interjection.

**N. Macdonald:** The minister of silviculture has something to say.

It's nice to hear from you, the minister of silviculture. How is that going? Are you increasing the budget on that? No, you're not. You're not.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member.

**N. Macdonald:** And the Woodworker Lien Act — is that coming forward? There was a promise just two weeks ago that it was coming forward. Is it coming?

**Deputy Speaker:** Member.

The member will direct his remarks through the Chair.

**N. Macdonald:** My apologies. He was speaking to me, but I will....

You also have Thompson Falls, Cedar Creek, the Illecillewaet, Kicking Horse — 20 or so other proposed projects, all of which this government feels it is appropriate to move forward without any local say, and it's not.

People are being clear that unless you can come into our communities and convince us it's an appropriate project, it should not proceed. That is good government. That is a government that respects what people think, but that is not the government that we have.

You also have institutions, like B.C. Hydro, that have provided tremendous value over the decades, institutions that need to be protected. In describing the commons, I would go on to programs that we have in health care, programs that we have in public education.

One of the experiences I've had is to live in areas where that public health, that public education is something that the wider population doesn't have. I spent six years in Africa, and anybody who goes to a place where you have to pay to have proper health care.... You realize that it is something that is incredibly precious when you come back to a country where, when you run into health problems, you actually have the population, the country as a whole chipping in to make sure that you're looked after. Those are areas that I think we need to focus on.

[1530]

A second area that a throne speech should have addressed, and that I believe a New Democrat government would address, is social equity. This province is becoming more and more unequal. There are repercussions for that. I don't think that it sits as a value for all British Columbians. I think that British Columbians want a society where they see fairness, and yet we're moving away from that.

One of the great equalizers is education. This government talks about it, and they use the same spin again and again about the dollars they spend, but the fact is that each and every British Columbian who knows anything about the education system knows that there are problems there.

There are problems with how the system is being funded. It does not help to try to deny that those problems are there. It doesn't help to have the 250- or 260-odd members of the public affairs bureau putting out spin saying what every school board knows is a fact — somehow trying to present it as not a fact.

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

If we are serious about providing education, then we need to put the resources towards it so that it will work. I will say, for the sake of some members, that there's something very positive about one initiative. That's that all-day kindergarten. All-day kindergarten is a positive step forward. That is something that is there. It is there as an option to the parents who want to use it. It will be beneficial.

The StrongStart centres that I've visited — which should never be confused with child care; you're coming there with your child — those are good initiatives. I have gone there and seen programs. The investments we make in our children are absolutely the smartest thing that we can do as a society, but we have to recognize that there is a cost, and we have to make that investment if we expect to move forward.

I'll be clear. The K-to-12 system is not being managed the way that it needs to be, and that's a problem.

Then you move to the university. I think most members would be surprised to know — I think the wider public would be surprised to know — that if the budget stays the same as it was projected to, university tuition is going

to provide more money to the coffers of this province than corporate tax. So you have 18-, 19-, 20-year-olds that somehow can afford more than TELUS and Teck Cominco and others. It seems out of balance because it is out of balance.

If we're serious about doing university education and trades education, then there is a cost to it that should be met. The only way we will move forward is if we have those that are the young given the tools to succeed on all of our behalf collectively.

Social equity. You can't talk about that without speaking about seniors again. At a time when they're asked, with the residential care changes, to spend, on average, I think, in total \$56 million more for the residential care rates.... When they're asked to do that....

At the same time you have the banks with a \$110 million tax cut. If it seems unequal, it's because it is. It's the direction that this government, through its policy, has taken this province. It has created more poor people and more that are wealthy, and that social inequity simply does not make sense as good social policy.

The last thing that I want to talk about as an idea that I think is important for us to talk about is democracy and due process. In each of the bills.... It goes to TransLink. It goes on IPPs. It goes to the health authorities. In one area after another you have had local decision-making — the ability of people to participate properly in the political process — degraded by this government. In fact, I would argue that the way this House works has been degraded consistently by this government and that a huge disservice is done.

You know, there was recently a decision made by an arbitrator on Bill 33, which was an education bill about capped limits for class sizes. The arbitrator looked at the committee stage, what the minister said, and used that as an interpretation.

It's important. The committee stage is important, but I think most British Columbians would be surprised to think back to a time when the carbon tax, changes to the electoral laws — eight bills in all — were passed by this House with no debate. No debate. Complete contempt in this House for the processes that we're supposed to protect and we're supposed to have respect for.

[1535]

That we see consistently — removing people from due process, removing people from the ability to participate in the political process.

The idea that every good thought comes from the Premier's office is an idea I completely reject. You cannot centralize that decision-making without damaging the quality of the ideas that you have. So democracy, due process — things that have to be improved upon.

We do not have a committee system that works. At the rare time where MLAs from both parties are actually able to sit down and talk about things in a structure that is different than what we're participating in today,

good things do happen. The actual difference between our beliefs is not that great, and our common interest is surprisingly similar. But we again and again set up structures that allow no opportunity for full debate.

One of the things that I've suggested to the Minister of Forests.... Forestry is an incredibly complex and incredibly important file. It has collapsed in a way that is profound — 71 manufacturing facilities gone and 30,000 jobs lost. That is good for nobody.

There are answers. They will be complex and difficult. But as legislators, how are we able to participate in finding those solutions? Why do we not have a committee that is dealing with forestry, groups of MLAs from both sides that are going around and trying to take the answers that are out there?

We have people who know this industry better than any other people in the world, who know this land, who feel strongly about it. They want a vehicle to have their ideas come through to this place and produce policy that's going to work for British Columbians. Why aren't we doing that?

Those are the three things that I would say. In a throne speech we would see a protection of the commons, policies, our land. We would see social equity worked on in a meaningful way — what clearly is not a priority for this government, but it should be. Finally, we need to improve that democratic process, due process. People want to participate. They choose not to because they have lost faith in what we are doing here. They don't think it matters.

I'll tell you, on the HST, you could make the argument about the value of that value-added tax, and I would listen to it respectfully. But where I say this government has gone completely wrong is in running for office, promising not to bring in the HST and turning around in a very cynical move and bringing it in. It is wrong. The government should not be doing that,

If you truly believe this is the right thing, you should take it to the electorate and earn the mandate to take it forward. I would say that when you couple the HST with the fact that the fiscal state of this province was misrepresented, when you couple that with the fact that you are not protecting health care and education in the way you promised, it cuts to the very legitimacy of the government.

For a government to think that it can hold on for four years when the wider population thinks that it lacks legitimacy, that is a problem. It's a problem in particular for B.C. Liberals, but I'll be honest. It's a problem for politicians as a whole. We need to think about the legitimacy. We need to think about engaging the population and make them excited about politics, make them excited about participating and make that participation meaningful.

With that, I thank you for the opportunity, as always, to speak. I look forward to other speakers.

### Point of Privilege (Reservation of Right)

**K. Corrigan:** I'd like to reserve the right to raise a question of personal privilege.

**Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Member.

### Debate Continued

**D. McRae:** I'm pleased to rise today to respond to the throne, though I must say it's been a tough couple of weeks for me. I celebrated my 40th birthday last week. I went through a mid-life crisis very quickly, and in the same week I also found out that I was ten pounds away from being classified as medically obese. So it's been a little rough.

[1540]

However, I've been grounded. I've been doing diapers for three-month-old Chloe daily. My daughter Gracie has been an absolutely great help, but I'd like to say that my wife, Deanna, has been very supportive.

I've lived in the Comox Valley my entire life. I'm very proud of that. I want my children and their children to have an opportunity to have the greatest quality of life that this province can provide. The decisions we make today lay the framework of what our province will look like in the coming decade and beyond.

This throne speech comes at an opportune time. The world and Canada are emerging from a recession that has been unmatched since the Great Depression. Technology has changed the way we do business. It has changed the way we shop, access information and entertain ourselves.

Climate change is a factor that dominates our lives. Sadly, in the Lower Mainland Cypress is lacking snow; whereas not too far away on Mount Washington we have some of the highest snow levels for a ski hill not just in Canada but in the world. We enjoyed record heat waves last summer yet had the Courtenay River flood to the worst high level in my lifetime.

There are challenges, no doubt, but we are so lucky to live in this province. We have a population that is highly educated. We have a fantastic health care system, abundant resources, a diverse but very desirable climate, ranging from the Peace River in the north to Vancouver Island in the south, unparalleled natural beauty and a great economic and geographic location. We are poised to emerge from this economic recession and have a very, very bright future.

We are so fortunate that the Olympics are going to be held in this province. In 2009 PricewaterhouseCoopers released a study stating that between 2003 and 2008 the games were responsible for so many things. Over 20,000 jobs have been created, and 3,400 new businesses have emerged.

VANOC has spent \$1.6 billion on goods and services. Today they are spending between \$3 million and \$4 million a day, with 78 percent of that funding going to B.C. companies, directly benefiting our residents. Furthermore, sponsors, suppliers, businesses, athletic teams and visitors will add another \$2 billion to the economy of British Columbia.

I was fortunate enough to be invited to be in Vancouver last week and walking around downtown. Remember, this is February in British Columbia. This is not a prime shopping season, yet I saw customer after customer emerging from stores with bags full.

Many, I'm sure, were British Columbia citizens, but because of the Olympics we have the advantage of seeing where people come from. Everybody walks around with a jacket with their country's name on the back, showing how proud they are of it. When you see a person from Russia walking into your hotel with five bags from Robson Street, this is a direct-impact, positive benefit to British Columbia that we would not have had without the Olympic Games.

I love legacies. Think back to many years ago. I said earlier I was 40 years old. When I was 16, the province had Expo 86. Can you imagine British Columbia without Expo 86?

You may also remember that prior to Expo there were naysayers complaining about it. "Oh, it's expensive. It's going to be a waste of time. It is not something the province needs." But can you imagine the province without the legacy of Expo 86? How many brochures have got Science World plastered on the front of them?

B.C. Place Stadium is getting refurbished, but it's still there and has provided entertainment for so many different venues, whether it is a soccer game or whether it is a football game. In 1988, I enjoyed Bon Jovi in that very concert hall.

Canada Place — unbelievable. Sure, it's the 1980s, but what a gorgeous building, one that we use as a hallmark in western Canada.

My colleagues in the Okanagan, can you imagine taking the old Fraser Canyon Highway down to the Lower Mainland? But no, we have the Coquihalla Highway. Why? The province needed it, as the province was growing. It is a legacy that we are lucky to have today.

These are assets and icons we use to market B.C. to the world. Expo provided the impetus for their construction. These Olympics will provide their legacy. And \$580 million has been spent on the Richmond speed skating oval, the Whistler Sliding Centre, the refurbished Pacific Coliseum.

[1545]

We are also getting the benefit, and I'm sure many of us have taken it, of the Canada Line to the airport. I have taken it three times, and every single time that SkyTrain is full of people who are not in cars, travelling in a far more efficient manner.

The Sea to Sky Highway was one of the most dangerous stretches of pavement in British Columbia, which makes it one of the most dangerous stretches of pavement in North America, and it needed refurbishing. We brought it in under budget, on time. We will save lives, and we will provide economic impetus because of projects like those.

Furthermore, \$110 million has been targeted for the legacy endowment fund to provide support for ongoing operations of the venues that we've constructed. You know what? The Olympics don't just end at the February, and the Paralympics don't just end in March. We want to make sure that these benefits exist for future generations to enjoy.

Many of you, and some are older than I, may remember in past years skating on the Robson Square ice rink. You haven't been able to do it for a while, but you know what? You can now. That facility has been refurbished, and the outdoor skating rink will be reopened to the public both during and after the games as another legacy right in downtown Vancouver for kids and adults to enjoy and be active.

How about the arts and culture? It's not just about sport. It's also an opportunity to celebrate and showcase Canada's and British Columbia's arts and culture. There's a \$20 million arts legacy fund that supports arts and cultural activities leading up to and beyond the 2010 Olympics.

Madam Speaker, \$20 million has been invested in 123 communities to improve facilities and equipment as part of the province's live sites program. So \$20 million has been committed by the government of Canada in the development of live celebration sites in Vancouver and Whistler. The Cultural Olympiad has delivered almost 1,000 separate arts and cultural events, with over two million people enjoying those events. That is supporting arts and culture in the province.

I don't want to talk just about the province; I want to talk about my own riding in the Comox Valley. You may have heard of some of these places: Belarus, United States, France, Ukraine, Russia, Sweden, China, Finland, the Netherlands, Australia, the Czech Republic, Switzerland and Ghana. What do they all have in common? They're all training parts of their teams in the Comox Valley right now and in the coming days.

For the Olympics we are seeing teams in these sports: biathlon, cross country, freestyle skiing, giant slalom, Nordic combined, parallel giant slalom, snowboard, ski cross and women's hockey — athletes training in our facilities in the Comox Valley as we speak. For the Paralympic Games we are seeing biathletes, cross-country skiers, sledge athletes, alpine and Nordic ski teams competing in the Comox Valley. Why? Because our ski hill has fantastic facilities at the same elevation, snow type and temperatures as the Callaghan Valley.

We started in 2003. When Vancouver won the Olympic bid, we were in B.C. Place Stadium. We knew we could

benefit and leverage from the Olympic advantage, and we have done so in a way that I would challenge no other small community in British Columbia has done. I am so proud of the work of my community.

It was showcased last week, those relationships we were building, when we had the Swedish women's hockey team, ranked No. 4 in the world, come to the Comox Valley. They came because of the relationships we've been building at the Beijing and Turin Olympics. They came, and they wanted to play. We were very lucky. They brought with them No. 7-ranked China. Two amazing teams. Over 1,100 people crammed into the Comox Valley Sports Centre last Sunday. We could have sold out three or four times more if we had the facility.

There was a pancake breakfast. Comox Valley Minor Hockey got a chance to work with them. Vancouver Island MusicFest, which is one of the best music festivals in North America, provided some amazing music, by way of The Sojourners, to entertain the crowd. There were face painters, arts and crafts, and even a Wii game for kids to enjoy.

I might say that the Swedes did win 4-2, but the quality of play was fantastic. I'd like to especially recognize the Chinese goaltender, who played, I would argue, Roberto Luongo-esque and kept the game close at hand.

**An Hon. Member:** Is that a word?

**D. McRae:** I made it up. Thank you for pointing that out.

When would a small community on the northwest coast of North America have a chance to host a team from Europe and a team from Asia in an international ice hockey game at any other time? They're here because of the Olympics.

[1550]

Our community is getting the benefit. We're showing off what we can do. We're exposing our citizens, but also we're exposing the world to places in British Columbia, who never would have seen them.

We're also getting a chance to see athletes firsthand, who have sacrificed so much time, energy, employment and their personal time to achieve the Olympic dream. These are young role models that are fantastic, and their role model transcends nationalities. I don't care whether you're Canadian or Chinese or Swedish. You recognize sacrifice, hard work and opportunity, and we have been so fortunate to get to meet these role models in our community day after day in the Comox Valley.

But it's not just the people. We're also talking about facilities in the Comox Valley. Some \$4 million has been dedicated to facilities and infrastructure in Mount Washington and the surrounding parkland. We have now become one of four locations in Canada, the second-largest country in the world, to have an automated biathlon target system. I haven't used it, but if

you want to attract good-calibre teams to train and you want to make sure your national team will be enticed to come and train, you need to have the facilities that they want. We were able to acquire that, and it will be a lasting legacy.

In May of this year construction will begin on the 40-bed Vancouver Island Mountain Sports Centre on Mount Washington. This will allow school groups, athletes and teams to come and train and enjoy the Comox Valley at a very reasonable price, and have easy access to our facilities.

Some of the best value from the Olympic and Paralympic Games is the international media exposure. Many countries field very high-profile athletes and teams that are followed by major media outlets back in their home nations. I'm pleased to say that we've been visited by Brazil, Australia, Sweden, Germany, Korea, China and Japan, just to name a few countries' major media outlets.

Let us not forget that the Comox Valley is also hosting the entire Ghana Olympic team. Sure, it is only one athlete, but the Snow Leopard has turned into a media darling. You may think back to Calgary in '88 and Eddie "The Eagle" or the Jamaican bobsled team. I don't care where you live in Canada; you remember those events.

I think you will remember the Snow Leopard too. His odds, they say, are not very good to win a medal — 500 to 1. But you know what? He has made great personal sacrifice to be here. With him he has also brought recently the BBC, the NBC *Today* show and CNN, plus broadcasters from at least 12 other nations, to do stories on Kwame as he has adopted Mount Washington and the Comox Valley as his home away from home in his efforts to compete in the 2010 Olympics.

But the throne speech is not just about the Olympics. There are other major things that are in the speech.

I'd like to talk about the first nations. I'm very proud that this government continues to recognize the importance of the first nations. In the Comox Valley we have the proud Comox First Nation peoples. Evidence suggests that they and their ancestors have been living in this region since before the first pyramids were built in Egypt. At one time as many as 4,000 first nations lived in the Comox Valley. Because of historical issues, this number has dwindled to less than 300 living on band lands today, but they are a very, very proud group of people.

It is essential that new revenue-sharing opportunities and agreements and treaties are signed to create social and economic opportunities for aboriginal peoples, which include them in the promise of future prosperity. In the Comox Valley we see examples where potential mining operations, a private university and sports academy, a residential and a commercial development are working with first nations peoples to create employment and investment opportunities in the Comox Valley.

Another issue is environmental assessment. We're very proud that we've created a six-month environmental assessment program. While the pre-environmental assessment phase requires much due diligence on the part of a prospective applicant, once the application enters the formal assessment phase, the window provides potential opportunities for investors and the assurance that the province will not drag out the approval process, and ensures that investment dollars come to our province.

This province is working hard with other provincial governments and the federal government to establish one process for one project. This will create a more efficient application system and reduce redundancy to the applicant.

[1555]

Remember, we are trying to attract investment dollars that are willing to move around the globe and are not loyal to one nation. We are not talking about compromising our standards. We merely want to work with other levels of government to ensure efficiency, streamline work and make sure that British Columbia is an attractive place to do business.

In the Comox Valley we have a company called Compliance Coal looking to create a coalmine. If you know the Comox Valley, you know we have a very strong coal heritage. The last mine closed in the 1960s. Cumberland built itself on the coalmining days. Many mines are proposed, and they don't happen. But if this project, after going through a rigorous approval process, were to go ahead, it would schedule to bring over 120 excellent-paying direct jobs to the Comox Valley — jobs that pay in the six digits. This is what we need in this province.

They also argue that there will be a multiplying effect, where maybe 200 to 300 more jobs will support those workers in the mine. More importantly than that, I'm excited to see our local citizens engage in the process. Some are in favour of the mine; others are against. However, they will work with the province and the provincial government to determine whether this province will gain the appropriate approvals. We have a system of government where citizens are empowered, and that makes me proud.

We live on Vancouver Island, and we've all taken B.C. ferries.

Interjection.

**D. McRae:** Yeah, I've lived on a lot too. Some of us spend way too much time....

My riding is on Vancouver Island, and I've taken the ferries countless times. I'm proud of the level of service the company offers. I've also taken ferries in Washington State and the Maritimes. Until you travel on other ferry systems, you don't recognize how good a ferry system we have. I have to say that the quality of vessel and the

service we have in British Columbia are second to none.

In my riding in the Comox Valley, there are three ferry routes: Comox to Powell River, Vancouver Island to Denman Island, and Denman Island to Hornby Island — not to mention that almost every product transported to Vancouver Island comes via boat. While the ferries and the men and women who work on them provide great service, I agree that the government needs to look at the B.C. Ferry Commission and ensure we offer service that is cost-effective, efficient and adaptable to ever-changing economic realities and ensure our ferry system remains vibrant into the future.

Comox Valley is also very lucky. We have an airport. We are fortunate because we have CFB Comox as well. Because of CFB Comox, we have an aviation infrastructure that is unparalleled for a small community on the west coast. When the community realized that we needed a new civilian terminal in 2000, there was widespread support to raise those dollars. In 2004 the Flight Officer Cottingham Terminal opened its doors.

Today we have one of the nicest terminal buildings on the west coast, with over one million passengers having gone through its doors since its opening. We are consistently rated as one of the highest-rated airports in terms of passenger satisfaction.

In 2009 alone, even with the economic downturn, 290,000 passengers either arrived or departed from the airport. This facility is a jewel in the economic future of the Comox Valley. While it is very successful, more can be done.

The Open Skies agreement has the potential to bring even more benefit to the Comox Valley. There are currently only eight nations who have signed passenger Open Skies agreements with Canada. Some of them are dominant world powers like Barbados, Dominican Republic and Iceland. Ireland, New Zealand and, of course, South Korea, United Kingdom and United States are a part of this. Open Skies will result in decreased fares, increased passenger traffic and more choice for the traveller.

Canada recently received approved-destination status from China. This means that China, with a population of 1.3 billion people, will have an easier time visiting this province. Yes, they will be attracted to the Lower Mainland because of the size and the facilities they offer, but I'm sure the Comox Valley with its natural beauty, its ski hill, its golf courses and its agriculture can also attract and enjoy the benefits of the approved-destination status.

The Open Skies agreement has the ability to add \$800 million and thousands of jobs to our provincial economy. We see every day how a great and vibrant airport can provide a community with economic activity. The Comox Valley wants to grow its airport traffic, and this announcement will be well received by our community.

Wood products. The throne speech talks about expanding markets for B.C. wood products both at home

and abroad. When one looks at the new convention centre in Vancouver, that building is truly a model of what can be done with our ingenuity: the impressive walls of Vancouver Island hemlock, the glass windows — I believe they're from Kamloops, I've heard earlier — and the green roof. It's on....

[1600]

Interjections.

**D. McRae:** The members from Kamloops love those.... They're from Kamloops. I've heard that once or twice in my time here, and I'm sure I'll hear it again. They're very nice windows, incredibly clear.

The green roof and its awe-inspiring location on Vancouver Harbour make this the landmark building for B.C., and it will be a landmark building for generations to come.

**An Hon. Member:** It's LEED platinum.

**D. McRae:** It's LEED platinum? You don't say. Unbelievable.

On Vancouver Island I recently had the opportunity to travel to a very small community called Deep Bay. Most of you have never heard of it. It's just south of my riding. There Vancouver Island University is working with the shellfish industry to create the Deep Bay shellfish research station. This 13,000-square-foot building is designed to both assist in the research but also promote the shellfish industry for both locals and tourists alike.

The amazing building is shaped, believe it or not, like a giant clamshell. Massive 60-foot wood beams curve over the roof, anchored in place by massive giant concrete U-shaped brackets.

The building overlooks the ocean and provides meeting space, a kitchen, hands-on displays, research facilities, limited dorms to allow both scientists, teachers and students to grow the shellfish industry in this province. It will be a legacy that people will visit over and over again, and I trust that you will all take the chance to visit it. The building also shows how versatile and beautiful wood is in our province and why we need to encourage people to use wood in a building-product manner.

We're also expanding our market for forest products beyond the traditional U.S. market. The U.S., obviously, will remain a vital market share, but a modern economy cannot be dependent upon just one market. The government of B.C. is making it a priority to increase our market share in places like India, Korea and especially China. The market for wood products in China is growing at an amazing pace. The Minister of Forests is working diligently to make sure we leverage that advantage.

China has a growing middle class and a growing awareness about how building with B.C. wood will allow China to build safer, more cost-effective buildings. It

will also allow them the ability to retrofit existing buildings, making them more safe for their citizens, as we saw in some of the natural disasters the impact of faulty building structures.

I'm proud to say that B.C. also has one of the best school, college and university systems in the world. I have received two degrees from UBC. It was a long time ago. But it was interesting. When you're young and you graduate from high school.... It was neat. In those days we had a couple of choices if you wanted to go to university — SFU, UVic and UBC. I chose UBC and had a great time there. Today our university and college offerings have expanded way beyond that.

**Hon. K. Krueger:** Who did that expansion, brother?

**D. McRae:** We did that expansion.

**An Hon. Member:** Tell us about it.

**D. McRae:** Well, I'll tell you about it if you want me to. You're right.

I would talk about Thompson Rivers University. However, the people in Kamloops may not hear me and applaud, but the Thompson Rivers University is an unbelievable example of the growing system we have.

In the Comox Valley, as I digress to the Kamloops area, we also have the North Island College. It's an excellent school that offers a wide range of academic and trades programs to residents and visitors to the north Island.

The province's EQA program will enable public and private post-secondary schools to attract international students. These students are attracted by the quality of life, the safety and the ability to learn English that they receive in British Columbia — added to that, the ability to receive an excellent education program. These students bring vibrancy to the schools they attend. They bring money to the schools and the communities where they live.

In the Comox Valley we also have an opportunity that was not even considered five years ago. A company, Sage Hills, is proposing to build a private university and sports academy on approximately 2,000 acres south of Courtenay. They are planning to attract international students and athletes from around the world to visit and learn in the Comox Valley.

By some estimates this company will bring up to 700 education-related jobs to the community. These jobs are well-paying, environmentally friendly and sustainable and are what the Comox Valley in British Columbia needs as we grow into the future.

Sage Hills is able to consider this kind of venture because B.C. has such a strong reputation around the world. I am pleased to say that Comox Valley is taking advantage of it and thankful to Sage Hills for considering it.

[1605]

The harmonized sales tax. Right now residents in B.C. are paying tax every day and don't realize it. When a company buys a pickup truck, they pay over \$4,000 for that truck in PST. It's passed on to the consumer. When a gravel company buys a big excavator, they could pay up to \$20,000 in PST, and that's passed on to the consumer.

When a person buys a new home, they pay thousands in hidden PST for items like flooring, lighting and plumbing fixtures. When a person buys a doughnut at a local coffee shop, they are paying PST on the machinery that makes the doughnut, costs of transportation and the uniforms that they have the employees wear at their favourite doughnut place. These are all passed on to the consumer, tax on tax on tax.

Over 130 nations around the world have adopted a value-added tax for a good reason. It makes their goods more competitive for both domestic and international consumption, and that in turn, ladies and gentlemen, leads to jobs.

How important are the forestry, construction, agriculture, mining, oil and gas, transportation, manufacturing and small business sectors to the well-being of British Columbia? These are the sectors that will grow our economy into the future. We need to make sure they are able to thrive and grow. The HST will attract investment to this province.

It did not become more important than when Ontario moved to adopt the HST in March of 2009. To be honest, though New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and even Quebec had gone down that path ahead of us, there was no real dire threat to our economy. But when the largest province in Canada in terms of population, GDP and its attractive geographic location to major U.S. markets moved to this model, it soon became obvious we would have to act.

I suppose we could have done nothing. We could have done nothing and watched the jobs slowly leak away from this province, investment dollars disappear, research and development move to other places, and in four years we could have this conversation. We could talk about how we need to do something.

Economists were almost unanimous in their belief that a value-added tax is needed to remain competitive in both the national and international marketplace. If you think this is not true, look south to our neighbours in the United States and watch what has happened to their economy over the past several decades. Jobs and investment are leaving their nation, moving to jurisdictions where it is easier to do business. We need to make sure that the jobs stay here and that we attract new dollars.

It would be nice to believe that people want to do business with B.C. because of our beautiful vistas, our charming people, but this is not a reality. Money in this modern era will move around the globe. It is not loyal to a nation or a people. It will go where it can flourish, and

it is essential we do our best to remain as competitive as possible in the coming decades.

The opposition will say that they're against the HST. I challenge anyone to look through the *Hansard* from the fall session, and while their opposition was widespread, do they ever have any constructive criticism? If the HST is not what we need to do to grow our economy, what should we do? That's what I'd like to hear, and I'm looking forward to this session to hear what they actually have to say. Constructive criticism is perhaps something new. Good luck.

I think it's obvious that doing nothing is not an option. It's easy to criticize, but what we need to do in this modern world is provide leadership, and the B.C. Liberal Party is doing that today and will continue to do that in this coming term.

This government has reduced taxation for individuals, small business and corporations to amongst the lowest in the nation, and while doing this, we have seen the annual provincial budget grow and grow and grow. We've invested record amounts in health care and education, social programs, and arts and culture. While we did this, we also balanced the provincial budget and created surpluses. We have an excellent financial record, and we will continue with that financial record into this coming mandate.

This government for the past nine years has shown a willingness to never overtax individuals and businesses, and don't let anyone convince you this has changed. The world is constantly changing, and we need a government who is willing to recognize and react to this in a proactive manner to provide solutions that will work in a modern economy.

B.C.'s been blessed with an abundance of clean, renewable and cost-effective power. We have this because our political leaders in the 1950s and the 1960s recognized the province's ability to generate this resource. However, while the population of the province has more than doubled in my lifetime, our electricity demands have increased substantially. We have not made the necessary investments to ensure we have enough power to supply our needs today and in the future.

This is changing. We will build on our potential for bioenergy, run-of-river, wind, geothermal, tidal, wave and solar energy. We will create a diverse supply of energy — one that will meet our needs today and in the future.

The government will report on the Site C review this spring. This major hydro infrastructure project will attract its share of criticism I'm sure, but the reality is that we need projects like this to meet our future needs.

[1610]

With that, I conclude my remarks to the throne speech.

**N. Simons:** It's once again my honour and my privilege to stand in this chamber representing the people of

Powell River and the Sunshine Coast — who are politically active and involved and always willing to offer me their advice, always willing to give me their support and encouragement as I try my best to represent their interests here.

I'd like to acknowledge my family, my brothers and sisters, my in-law equivalents and their families and, of course, my mother who, along with my dad, raised us to do what we could to make a positive contribution to our community.

As an active senior, my mom continues to teach the special needs kids in the public school system in Montreal three days a week, and I have great respect for her. [Applause.] I'll tell my mother she got applause, and that's good.

I'd also like to thank my partner Scott for his insight and his creativity, not to mention his support and his love.

Some of you may know that I got a gold record for my cello playing on the 2004 Rise Against album. Well, I should point out that my partner, Slim Milkie, as he's known in the country music field, has given me the opportunity to repeat this feat with the release of his recent CD *Silverado*. I have to say that I only appeared on one track on the album. That's an issue I'll keep to another time.

It was an enjoyable.... I'm somewhat overshadowed by the nimble lips of His Worship Mayor Robertson, as he plays the tuba on the album. It's available on iTunes. I should point that out since we're here promoting British Columbia and the artists of British Columbia.

Interjections.

**N. Simons:** I think I actually have some collection to do from some of the members opposite.

Turning back to the constituency, I'd like to just acknowledge the elected officials who represent their constituents up and down the coast. In particular, I'd like to acknowledge Chief Clint Williams of the Sliammon First Nation and Garry Feschuk, Chief of the Sechelt First Nation, who I'm in contact with on a fairly regular basis. We maintain good communication. I think it's imperative that those relationships are built on a personal level as well as a political level, and I think it serves us all admirably well.

I'd also like to acknowledge the mayors: Mayor Stewart Alsgard of the beautiful city of Powell River, Mayor Darren Inkster of Sechelt and Mayor Barry Janyk of Gibsons.

I also have to make sure I recognize that chairs of the regional districts and directors, along with dozens of councillors, dozens of school trustees and Islands Trusts representatives, all make up the democratic system that we have in this province and on a local level as well. Without their commitment to their community, without

their ability to relay messages and important information to me, our system wouldn't work the way it does.

I have to just take this opportunity to thank them for the work that they do, to recognize that it's sometimes very difficult working at the local level of government, as many of my colleagues in this House acknowledge and are aware. I see that the commitment they offer and the dedication they have to their work are appreciated by the constituents.

We have an active political community on the Sunshine Coast. People are aware of the issues that they're facing. They turn out to vote in larger numbers than the average constituency by quite a bit. I acknowledge, as well, the constituents of Powell River–Sunshine Coast.

This year we'll be seeing a lot of folks from the Association of Vancouver Island and Coastal Communities meeting in Powell River. I'm looking very much forward to that and connecting with local government representatives from the Island and the Sunshine Coast.

I'd like to congratulate all those who were involved in celebrating the upcoming Olympic and Paralympic Games from the constituency of Powell River–Sunshine Coast. That includes those who were torchbearers, those who arranged committee meetings and events that reflected enthusiasm and excitement about the community coming together to celebrate their skills — musical skills, artistic skills, dancing and other cultural activities.

[1615]

I enjoyed the festivities in the communities and the examples of quiet confidence and assuredness that have always characterized Canadian patriotism. The country's support of its athletes was evident. I hope that the lasting legacy of these games which are about to begin will be our realization that if and when we set our mind to do something, we can achieve our goals with perseverance and commitment. I speak generally about that because it's not only about sport. I believe that this philosophy needs to be spread to others who seek to achieve the highest level of whatever occupation they choose to be involved in.

Primarily, of primary importance as a society, we have to make sure that the community is the place where the resources are there for people to be able to achieve their goals. I'll talk a bit more about that a little later when we talk about the possible legacies and impacts of the games on our communities.

I believe that if we hang our hat on our ability to meet deadlines for construction and we pat ourselves on the back for our abilities to stick to certain budgets, we should be able to do the same thing for homelessness. We should be able to do the same thing for child poverty.

We've invested \$900 million — it's almost a billion dollars — in improving security in this province, making our ferry terminals as welcoming and secure as any fed-

eral prison and our skies safe from known and imagined threats. If we can invest almost a billion dollars into security infrastructure, into barbed wire atop chain-link fences as people are welcomed to the Sunshine Coast, surely we can invest in our educational infrastructure.

School boards across the province have had to absorb new costs while losing funding. Closure of hundreds of schools in this province, the loss of facilities grants for them to maintain the physical infrastructure that supports the education system, and the cutting of parent advisory committee funding are all evidence of skewed priorities, in my opinion.

If we can own a podium for our athletes, we should be able to support school-based sports in our public education system. We should be able to provide the support to high school coaches or to community coaches who are interested in, perhaps, tournament play. Yet, as we've seen in ridings across this province — those small, local sporting associations, those teams that look forward to occasional travel to play with other teams — we see their funding and the viability of their programs being undercut.

I'm not against the idea that we should strive for excellence, that we should seek to be the best at whatever we do. I have a problem when it's presented in a way that is arrogant or in a form of boosterism that doesn't recognize that Canadian values include humility — the quiet confidence that we've always had about our values, about how we compete and how we interact with other countries.

I'm looking forward to making sure that everybody who claps really loud is also aware that once the games are over, it doesn't mean that we can't stop trying to achieve good things for the province.

[1620]

For the last year or two we've seen the buildup to the party, and now we're starting to recognize that after the party's over, we're going to need a pretty good cleaning crew. This province isn't going to be as well placed as it could be to meet some of the challenges, especially if the throne speech is what we're going to get.

There's no evidence at all, thankfully, that throne speeches translate into policy or that they lead to changing of government direction. But if we actually look at the content of this speech, if we erase the rhetoric and the doublespeak, we see a government intent on pursuing their goal of reducing the ability of the public to be involved in public policy decisions. I'll talk a little bit more about that later.

In my office I have a picture of my godchildren. Jacqueline and Mario are lovely children who are daily reminders to me of the important work we do in this House. They inspire me to work for a better system of supports for families, and they motivate me to speak against government policies that will make their already complicated lives more difficult. Their picture reminds

me that government's lack of action is planned and is deliberate. Why else would they say they're going to do one thing and then do another?

B.C. has the lowest minimum wage in the country, the worst protection for young workers in North America and welfare rates that have remained unchanged for years despite us having among Canada's highest cost of living.

I understand that members from the government caucus would prefer that I said that while I was wearing red mittens, and it would make it all fine. But the truth of the matter is evident in study after study, report after report — independent offices saying the same thing over. Occasionally we hear farm animal noises when this issue is brought up in the House.

Madam Speaker, the throne speech said nothing to the children of this province. The throne speech said nothing to those who have lost jobs because of bad government policy over the last six or seven years. The throne speech didn't have a message for the seniors of this province, who are taking a financial hit while they reside in long-term care facilities that in some cases — and in the case of my riding — fall woefully below the safety standard set by this province last year.

The Olive Devaud Residence in Powell River is an old building with many seniors in residence. We know the doors are too narrow for patients to be removed from their room. We know that the structure doesn't meet building codes of today. We know the hallways aren't adequate. We know that the showers lead to rotting of the floor. We know that people have actually partially fallen through the floor in some places. We know that the staff there have been saying that it's impossible to work. We know that they have the highest injury rate of workers working with senior citizens.

We know that this residence needed replacement five years ago. It's been on the top of the list of the health authority for three years running. The land has been made available for the construction of a replacement facility. Yet the throne speech didn't say anything about making sure that residents of Powell River were going to get a facility so that their aging parents could live close by.

[1625]

Instead, we got a statement of ideology that in order to be able to go ahead with this project, it requires private partnership. How long do the seniors of Powell River have to wait just because the government is interested in pursuing its ideological goals ahead of the goals or the needs of the seniors and residents of Powell River?

This throne speech, for what it was, was basically more of the same. More selling of our common natural resources; the prediction of more underfunding to programs; tax cuts to big businesses, made up by the regular folks through the HST, the harmonized sales tax. I have a bit of a problem using the word "harmonized" because it's usually something to do with melody, and in here

it's dissonant. But that's just my musical interpretation of this.

The HST is understood and recognized by, I would say, the vast majority — if you're thinking near 90 percent, 85 percent.... The vast majority of British Columbians believe that it's going to cost them more, and unfortunately, there's been no credible evidence put forward by a government with plenty of opportunity to provide such to say any different.

We're not all tax analysts on this side of the House, but we have yet to see any credible evidence to suggest that we, as the public, are going to see any trickle down from any benefits accrued by business. It just seems to me that we're relying on crossing our fingers and hoping.

But more egregious, I think, than the HST itself and the cost for average folks to buy a bicycle or go out to a restaurant is the fact that the last throne speech said nothing about it. The last throne speech was silent on the issue. Worse, when we heard from government about this issue, it was for them to say that they weren't going to institute the HST.

But I sometimes wonder if the government isn't concerned about the cynicism that it nurtures in the people of the province. Really, what they're doing is trying to get rid of the importance of government in the first place. It's clear that deregulation, from their perspective, really means opening the door wider.

Once again, we have no problem with ensuring that businesses aren't faced with unnecessary and costly delays, but we have to recognize that all of the environmental protections that have been built into the system over the years were built in for a reason. When we cavalierly look at regulation as if it's just one big, bad word, we forget that regulation sometimes means protection. Regulation sometimes means public participation, consultation — meaningful consultation, in fact.

So I'm concerned when I see this continued zeal towards eliminating the role of government in the management of public policy, to allow the market to determine absolutely everything. I don't think that bodes well for our province's economy, for our province's environment, for the strength of our communities.

[1630]

We see a government intent on deregulation for the sake of deregulation, and we know, as legislators, that when they did that to child and family services, there were tragic results. Deregulation in and of itself should not be the end goal. Good governance should be. Good governance. But what we see is that those who will benefit the most from this so-called deregulation will be, once again, among the largest donors to the party represented in government.

The public needs to recognize, or I hope that the public recognizes, that it's not a good idea to design our energy policy, to design our environmental policy, based on what they're being told by the largest corporation standing to benefit. This is just contrary to the fundamental

principles of our democracy. For some reason, it doesn't seem to bother members of the government caucus that they promise one thing, they do something else, and then when they promise deregulation, it's solely for the purposes of benefiting a certain elite few.

The public is left wondering what's gotten into us, and my hope is that we can actually, as opposition members, convince government to change their pattern of behaviour and perhaps put more emphasis on goals that'll improve the quality of life of British Columbians.

When I hear a throne speech.... As we find ourselves in difficult economic times, it troubles me that we heard nothing about the exponential rise in homelessness in this province. We have homeless people living in overcrowded shelters or sleeping in shelters. We have people who are living in tents, under leaky corrugated roofs in the rural parts of our province. There are many faces to homelessness, but I didn't hear anything about homelessness in this throne speech.

I heard one mention about policy for children: the Child in the Home of a Relative program. I don't know if it was put in there as an afterthought or if it was meant to sort of confuse the public into thinking that there were some added benefits about to be accrued by children who are vulnerable and unable to live in their parental home. But let there be no mistake. Children of the province are not going to feel the impact from the change that the ministry is making. Social workers will.

We're adding more work to social workers as we see their numbers dwindle, as their caseloads increase. Here we have basically the repeat of a promise made before. Child in the Home of a Relative is likely to become another form of foster care, but without the benefits of support, and it just troubles me.

I would have liked to see more discussion around the needs of seniors — not just seniors in residential care, as I alluded to earlier with my discussion or my words about Olive Devaud, but seniors who are living alone and who see their cost of electricity rising.

[1635]

We often see seniors looking after their spouse, in many cases with very little support, and we've seen programs that have propped up folks in this situation. We've seen programs that decrease their isolation and promote socializing. We've seen those programs disappear. Yet we see an immense infusion of cash into areas that will benefit some but will just benefit few.

In my riding there are a number of issues. There are a number of projects that are being proposed that I wouldn't say result in community conflict but disagreements between community members. Deregulation of the environmental assessment process is not going to resolve those conflicts. In fact, they stand to magnify the conflicts when regulatory oversight is reduced.

So for example, on Texada Island there's a proposal for an aggregate quarry. Yet it's in a place where there

are sensitive cave karst features. What we don't have in Powell River–Sunshine Coast is a land and resource management plan, so we're left once again to fight it out amongst ourselves.

I would point out that Powell River–Sunshine Coast is only a small part of the province that doesn't have such a plan; 85 percent of the province is covered by an LRMP, but Powell River–Sunshine Coast isn't, where we have the highest concentration of independent power production projects. We also have aggregate wood products and so many community conflicts that could so well be addressed by a government committed to a good process that reflects the needs of the citizens.

Instead, we're going through this revolving door of conflict. There's no other word for it. People are disagreeing on projects, and they have valid concerns on both sides. Yet once again after being promised a land and resource management plan a few years ago, government has failed to produce.

I think it's juxtaposing what our communities really want with this one-track kind of approach that this government has that makes this whole process frustrating.

Interjections.

**N. Simons:** I'll just wait until they finish their cabinet meeting.

I don't mean to be soporific. These issues are important to my constituents, and I certainly would like to see a government that takes initiative and leadership in the area of supporting public programs that are an investment in the people of the province. If we fail to do that, our social deficit in 2030 won't give us time to look back to this decade with rosy-eyed glasses.

We look at our prison system where men and women are warehoused in an atmosphere of violence but with utter boredom, only to be released into our community and reoffend. Where is government leadership? Where is government leadership in our prison system? I don't see it.

I don't see the leadership in child welfare. I don't see the leadership in care for our seniors, in reducing waitlists for people waiting for medical surgeries. I don't see leadership in the areas that British Columbians have been asking for — affordable living, healthy communities, involvement in the public process.

The throne speech was a disappointment — not an unexpected disappointment, I'll confess. However, my hope is that the people of British Columbia will speak loudly when they see that they've been misled by government and that they'll speak loudly in saying that they won't put up with it.

[1640]

I'm looking forward to an opportunity to engage the public, and I appreciate this opportunity.

**Deputy Speaker:** I'd like to ask all members who are having separate conversations to keep their voices down so that we can hear the main speaker.

**Hon. R. Coleman:** I'm pleased to rise today to speak to the throne speech. I will divert from what I would normally do on the throne speech because I want to talk about some things that happened in my riding recently and may not be quite as partisan as I have been in the past on some subjects. I know that will be hard for members to accept. I'm sure I can get there at some point in the next half-hour, Members, just for your edification, because I know that you would be disappointed if I didn't go there at some point in time.

I represent the community of Fort Langley–Aldergrove, which is part of the Langley communities of Aldergrove, Fort Langley, Willoughby, Milner, Langley city and Murrayville, with my colleague from Langley. It is a remarkable honour that I've had to represent this community for the last almost 14 years as a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

I have, sitting in my office — because evidently they don't have a lot to do this afternoon in the office, and I'm told that they decided to tune in to listen to me speak, so I don't want to bore them too badly — my two constituency assistants. Ida Fallowfield and Sheryl Strongitharm have been with me for, in one case, over a decade and, in the other one, close to a decade. I don't know how I'd do this job if they didn't keep that operation flowing over there and keep things going. Frankly, by just mentioning that, I'll probably get that much more work out of them.

I come from a family that's pretty patriotic and that really loves this country. It comes from a number of places. My father and my father-in-law and my grandfather all served in various wars to fight for the freedom of this country, to fight for what we would have — a peaceful opportunity to do what we do every day.

As I grew up, as a child I had a great opportunity handed to me in 1970 by Rotary International, which gave me the opportunity to do a trip across Canada called the adventure in Canadian citizenship. I got to go to Ottawa at that age — out of a family of six children; I was only 16 years old, in grade 11 — and meet young people from across the country.

Also, when I got there, I got to go to Parliament, and I also got to go to the Governor General's house. The unique thing about that was that as a Canadian, basically born in this country, I received something that most Canadians don't have. I actually received my certificate of Canadian citizenship from the Governor General.

Now, the significance of that for me was that my father, Don Coleman, was a Canadian, born to Canadian parents in Colorado. He had actually applied for and received his certificate because he wanted to have that copy at the time. It gave me an interesting connection with my father, which I've always been thankful to Rotary

for. I think that it actually helped us with a connection that maybe my other five siblings didn't enjoy. It is pretty neat, actually, to have that piece of paper.

I've been a reserve officer in the military, and I've been a police officer. Any time I speak, especially after what I saw on Monday with the patriotism with the torch, I think of those who have served this country overseas and continue to do so overseas, who basically fight and control and support the freedoms that we enjoy as a country.

I think of them because I think that as we go through the next few weeks, as we enjoy the real camaraderie that Canadians will enjoy across Canada as we host the 2010 Olympics, we will remember those who are actually making sacrifices for us. Whether it be the police officers who come from across Canada or the members of the Canadian military who are here to make sure that these are secure games and who will work long shifts and many hours to protect our communities in the background while everybody enjoys what's going on, or whether it's those that are overseas, I think it's important that we remember that.

As I've watched the torch come across this country, and as I've seen it, I had a couple memories that I have of the last Olympics in Canada, which was 1988 for me, as far as my memory of something that touched me personally in the Olympics. I remember actually collecting those ugly glasses that Petro-Canada put out with the little gold flame on the side. I dare say I probably still have some of them in a box somewhere.

[1645]

I also remember the torch coming through Aldergrove, where I lived at the time, and hundreds of people on the streets celebrating the Olympic torch coming through that community from across Canada as it headed its way to Calgary.

Somebody recently asked me: "What was your favourite Olympic memory?" I'm sure they thought I would say the 2002 Olympic gold medal by both the men's and women's hockey teams. They were wrong.

My memory of the Olympics was sitting in my family room watching Elizabeth Manley nail it in the long program in the 1988 Olympics and winning the silver medal for Canada.

The reason that's a memory is watching my wife and my daughter leap to their feet and screaming how she nailed the program, and the joy that was in my household with our friends when we saw that person do something on behalf of our country. That's what I hope we see as we win gold medals — in abundance, I hope — over the next few weeks.

Madam Speaker, you know, the torch came to my riding on Monday. I've got to tell you about it, because it was something unbelievable. There were really three basic tenants — actually four if you count the city of Langley, which I'm sure the member for Langley will talk about.

The torch came across the Golden Ears Bridge and came to Fort Langley. Fort Langley is the place of the national historic site, the place where British Columbia was actually born on November 19, 150 years ago just this last November.

I've been in the fort for Canada Day celebrations, and I've been in the fort for other celebrations over the years, but I've never seen anything like this. I think Senator Gerry St. Germain said it best at the event when he said that in all of his life as a Senator and in politics, he's never seen anything like what he saw that day.

When we walked into the fort, there were 2,000 schoolchildren. They had varying top hats on in different colours matching the Olympic rings around the infield of the fort. In addition to those 2,000 schoolchildren were another 5,000 people in the fort waiting for the torch to arrive, only to stop for a second as it went by on the steps of what we call the big house where, frankly, British Columbia was born. As they came into the fort, outside the fort were at least two or three times as many people — probably 10,000 to 15,000 people — lining the road in Fort Langley down Glover Road, the route of the May Day parade. As big a crowd as you'll ever see at any May Day parade was there.

As you listened to the people who actually spoke and as you watched this event, you were touched by a number of things. You were touched by Chief Marilyn Gabriel and her husband, Kevin. Marilyn is a great chief of the Kwantlen Nation in my community, and her relationship with my office and myself and our community is one of the great relationships of first nations across this country today.

Kevin and two of his friends actually did a song as the torch came by. How much they really appreciated their participation and how much they believe in this country and their own patriotism as a first nation in my community is something that all of you should actually see in person. You cannot see it any other way. You have to see it in their eyes and the warmth they're feeling towards their fellow man.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

As the torch came through Fort Langley and we saw this go on and the kids were thrilled and all this excitement took place, in another part of the community they were preparing for the torch, in Aldergrove. In Aldergrove they had taken half a ton of red plastic rolls and made red ponchos for 2,000 children to line the street. The children lined the street in Aldergrove, with another 6,000 or 7,000 people with them. One school had actually come with all the flags of all the countries that would participate in the Olympics and stood on the side of the road as the torch came by.

They moved on from there to the Langley Events Centre. At least 15,000 people were outside the Langley

Events Centre to greet the torch in one of its stops. If you haven't seen one of these stops, this is a high-energy thing that takes place that just gets people so excited and so keen and so proud to be Canadian.

[1650]

My community pulled it off in spades — 15,000 people at the Langley Events Centre. I've got to talk about that facility just for a second, because it's quite the backdrop to have 15,000 people waiting for the torch to come through a crowd. The backdrop is a building that has massive wood beams of B.C. wood that were actually architecturally designed so this building could show off wood for British Columbia, with an arena for 5,000 people, three gymnasiums for basketball and a world-class gymnastics centre, a fitness centre, day care and other facilities in the premises.

But you've never seen anything like the roar of this crowd when Lauren Barwick came through the crowd in her wheelchair. Lauren won gold for Canada in equestrian at the Beijing Olympics. She's our Olympic hero in Langley, and I've never heard anything or seen anything like it.

I looked down off the stage, and I saw the people and the joy in the people's eyes and how much fun they were having and how much they love this country. When they sang *O Canada* at the fort, and when they sang *O Canada* there at the events centre, if it didn't bring a tear to your eyes, then you're a person with no emotion whatsoever. You'd also have to be a person with no love for this country, because if you see this you know that this is a uniting factor in our country and in our nation and in the world with regards to how we can show people how we can work together.

All of this is brought together in my community by volunteers, led by a young man who is a councillor in my township of Langley, Jordan Bateman, who was out there at five o'clock in the morning putting up signs to make sure the parking was there for disabled folks at that event at the Langley Events Centre. People were out there to make sure that this community can celebrate and enjoy the freedom to do so and enjoy the beauty of the Olympics.

Just to sort of put the icing on the cake for a pretty neat day... I was listening to one of my colleagues earlier talk about a hockey game on Vancouver Island. The Langley Events Centre holds about 4,500 people for hockey. For an exhibition game between Slovakian and Russian women's hockey there that night, there were 4,250-plus people at the Langley Events Centre.

The neatest thing about that was this. You're sitting in the stands, and you're watching the teams as the national anthems are sung for their countries in your country. What are the players doing? Wild-eyed, taking pictures of us as a crowd that came out to support them. Thrilled to bits to have that kind of support in an exhibition game going into the Olympics to show them the

warmth of our country and how much we're committed to the Olympics.

I spoke to one official from Slovakia who said they had never played in front of this many fans at home on a good night. They were pretty over the moon about this thing.

As I reflect on that day, there was one other very special thing that day for me. That was that my grandson Gabriel was there. He loves music and loves to clap, and he really enjoyed the event. He was just a gem to be there with. As I watched the torchbearers get in the van to continue the legacy of that torch into the city of Langley, across to Cloverdale and over to Surrey and on to Delta and Richmond and the Peace Arch and all of that, I knew I was watching something that I may never see again in my lifetime, but hopefully he will, because he's only 19 months old.

You know, as I look at the Olympics from that perspective alone, I cannot get over how important it is for people to understand what sport and the Olympics and the unification of this type of an event can do for a country.

Now, I know that on Friday night about three billion people are going to tune in and watch the opening ceremonies in British Columbia. That's a pretty spectacular infomercial for our province. I think it'll be really neat to see the reactions of the people that go and enjoy it and those that watch it on television to the job that I'm confident that we can do on behalf of our province and our country to show that Canada's Olympics are a huge success.

[1655]

As I look at it, I also think about the different things that we've come out of the Olympics with. One of my favourites is — and if you haven't been there, please go; go to the Olympic oval in Richmond — when you think about what's underneath the surface, how the pipes are using heat to make the ice, how they're saving the energy and all the things they've done in that building that we can show the world about how we can do it and that we have to talk about.

It's hard to remember that when you stand inside the oval and look up at the ceiling, where there are a million board feet of pine beetle wood in the ceiling showing the world what we can do with wood and how we can build with wood and how we can actually encourage people to make investments in their countries with regards to how they can use that product — which is probably, without a doubt, the most environmentally solid product on the planet with regards to the environment and GHGs and those sorts of things — and how they could use it back in their jurisdictions.

When the athletes are in Whistler at the Olympic village, they can think about this: that they're actually in an architecturally designed, beautiful athletes village that looks wonderful from the outside. People remark

on how beautiful it is. Then they can think, if somebody tells them, that when they leave, those buildings will be picked up and moved across British Columbia to become permanent housing for people with mental health and addictions and seniors across B.C.

That's pretty cool, but the neat part about that is this. It actually shows the world what you can do with modular housing and, if you think about it, what we can do with architecturally designed housing that looks fantastic. You can't tell the difference between stick-built and what you can build in a factory. It is a way you could actually show the world how they could deal with some of their housing issues.

We've done it before in British Columbia by showing Indonesia how to do that after the tsunami. An NGO, after we did a pilot project over in Indonesia to show them what we could build and how we can do it modular, actually ordered 3,000 homes from a company in British Columbia to be delivered to Indonesia to solve a housing crisis they have there.

I know that today some of those NGOs are back, talking with some of our manufacturers in B.C. about what can be done in Haiti, to see what can be done.

As we go through that, we'll also know that in places like Surrey and Chetwynd and other small communities across B.C., some of that housing will show up after the Olympics and actually change somebody else's life to improve it.

Imagine thinking about the fact that you took someone who suffered from mental health and addiction who is now sleeping in the same room as somebody who won a gold medal at the 2010 Olympics, and they get to turn their lives around. Those are the opportunities these Olympics give us, and they give us an opportunity that's also kind of cool.

I have never had a more rewarding couple of weeks than I've had in the last two weeks in government. You might think it's because the torch came through Langley. That was pretty rewarding. You might think that it was because Gabriel was there. Well, that's always rewarding, because he's my grandson.

But the neatest part about the last two weeks is how I've had an opportunity to educate some jurisdictions around the world about how they should handle their own housing, mental health, addictions and homeless issues — those that have come and those that have called. Those that have visited our interpretive centre and asked the questions and that have, all of a sudden, found out that we're not ashamed to tell you that we have challenges of a social nature in our province.

We're not ashamed of that, but we will tell you the solutions, and we will tell you what we've accomplished, because that's important for you to know. So think about it this way.

I had one city newspaper come to me. About two million people is about the population they have down in

their area, and I won't name it because it's not fair to the poor reporter. He came to me and said: "You know, you've got 2,500 to 3,000 homeless people here."

I said: "Yes, that's true. It's about that. We have shelters for them, and we have housing that we're building for them. But when you go to write your story, think about this. You've got, actually, according to your records, 13,500 homeless people in your jurisdiction where you come from.

"How many integrated supports have you got out there for people with mental health, addictions and homelessness? How many shelters do you have?"

[1700]

"Ask these questions. How many units have you gone out and renovated and taken on to turn around for people? What do you have for a plan to build new? Do you have any outreach workers that go out and connect people to medical services and housing and supports, to deal with their mental illness and issues?"

I said: "Let me try and explain to you the story of British Columbia. In the last few years we've had homeless outreach people in 49 communities across the province of British Columbia — 49 communities. They've connected 8,700 people to supports and housing as of January 2010."

As we did that... These were folks who were homeless or at risk for homelessness that we've actually connected to housing and supports, and 80 percent of those people are still housed today. We know that some will recycle back to the street because of the significant issues they face in their lives.

I said: "What did we do about that? We recognized that we had some people with significant mental illness and addiction issues that weren't necessarily going to be handled in a program where they might be in housing with some supports to be able to turn their lives around."

They needed a longer-term stay, so we created the Burnaby Centre for Mental Health and Addictions. We allowed people to go in there, to stay longer and deal with the issue of their addictions so we could actually deal with their mental illness as well. As we did that, I told folks, we actually learned something. We learned again that not every person is the same, and that's why our whole strategy has been designed around people and not cutting ribbons and bricks and mortar. It's a piece of the puzzle, but it's not the puzzle.

I said to them: "Look, we have folks now that can come out of the Burnaby centre and go to a new facility that we've renovated at Riverview — and another one in the Fraser Valley where they can stay longer, with 24-hour supports, as they try and turn their lives around."

Yes, it's a form of reinstitutionalization for these folks, but we would fail them if we just stuck them in a room somewhere and said: "Here, there's somebody at the door, and you can have a meal a day and survive." We're not going to fail those people. We're going to continue to

find supports and solutions to their lives, because if we don't do that, we'll fail on that file. By failing on that file, we would hurt too many people.

One of the reporters said to me: "What do you do about social housing?" I said: "Well, I believe that in your city you're presently bulldozing some projects that you built that you called social housing and that became slums because you perpetrated something on their society."

I said: "What if they were integrated into the community? What if they were supported in the community? And what if I told you" — I said to him, the one reporter — "that in the last 3½ years, 9,000 families and 15,800 seniors, which was an increase of 3,600 since 2001, have been housed with supports in the community without us building a single stick of housing? First of all, you don't think I could have built 11,000 or 12,000 units of housing in three years — do you? But I have people living in rental accommodation in British Columbia who, every month, quietly get a cheque from the rental assistance program, and it better their lives."

They said: "Give me an example." I love giving examples. It's one of the great things I get to do in this job. So I said to them: "Look, I had a lady that came to a barbecue I was at. She said to me, after she heard me speak about rent assistance: 'I'm on rent assistance, and you can tell my story. I have six children. I had nowhere to go. I was going to go live in a station wagon with my six children. I heard about the rental assistance program on the radio. I applied. They helped me. I got a job. My children are doing better in school. We have a safe place to live.'"

She said to me: "God bless the rental assistance program because it saved my family." Now, she could have sat on a waiting list for years, hoping for social housing. Or she could have been helped immediately, and she was. When I tell people these things, they go: "Wow, that's incredible."

[1705]

They said: "What do you do about shelters?" I said: "Well, there used to be shelters that were just open in the daytime in B.C. back in 2001, and there were a few hundred of them. Today there are about three or four times that many that are permanent shelters in B.C. where we actually have a meal." They're open 24-7, so people don't get turned out to the street every day.

"Whenever the weather changes or volumes go up, we open additional temporary space," I said, "because it's important to understand that this is part of the continuum that we have where we connect people to housing with supports by having outreach workers in the shelters to help those people find their way in life." Pretty remarkable, actually.

Then I said to them: "You know, you don't have to believe me. Obviously, I'm the minister, and I'm going to be pretty excited about what we're doing with regards to these things, and I'm always excited to do these things. Here, let me just give you a couple of quotes."

I'll give you one. "There seems to be a lot of shelter space as far as I'm concerned. I know in past years I had trouble accessing shelter space, and this year it seems that they've made great strides opening up this particular location at First United. I know the Salvation has a number of shelter spaces, and it seems to me they're making progress." That's Allan Taffe. He's a Downtown Eastside resident who resides in a shelter, or did, as we try and find housing for him in the future.

You don't have to just listen to that. You can go and talk to people across British Columbia, or you can go and find these types of quotes. For instance: "I go out with the Red Cross teams and...walk the streets to let the people know the shelters are available. As we've been doing this, we're finding far less people. Where we used to find 40 to 60 people in an evening, we're now maybe finding ten."

They go on to say: "I can tell you right off the top of my head there were about 20 or 30 people that last year were coming in every night to the EWP shelters that are not around here this year. It's not because they're gone. They're actually housed." That's Jen Book, who's a coordinator for the Greater Victoria Extreme Weather Protocol in Victoria. It's not just about Vancouver. It's also about housing in Surrey and Prince George and buildings that are being built today and connections and the intervention project and all of these things working together.

As we do that, you'll notice that in the throne speech we talked about some other things to do with housing. Particularly, what we talked about was the affordability going forward and how you can change the built environment for our society. The built environment is pretty extensive. It's not just a home or a condo or a street or a park. It's actually an integrated relationship across the housing spectrum that we have to start thinking about if we're going to be successful for our citizens in the future.

That means things like this. It means thinking about how we handle solid waste and liquid waste, how we use our wastewater, how we're going to plan communities so that they don't require streets and curbs and cul-de-sacs all the time, if we could actually condense them and use transit to a better advantage to give people a quality of life — where we can change the footprint to rethink how our communities and buildings are built and how we can do that in the future.

This by no means is an easy chore, because it will be a dramatically large and extensive job to be done as we go forward to handle these things, but we can do it.

As I look at the throne speech.... I know I'd love to go on, but it goes so fast for me, and I haven't even got to the partisanship, and I may not. I do, though, believe that we can do a built environment, improve our code, our water management and things, and that's a project that this ministry will take on over the next ensuing years with communities across B.C. to be successful.

There's one piece of the throne speech I could not miss, having been around forestry and having been around the government for a long time, and that's the reference to clean energy and the green energy powerhouse for British Columbia.

I believe bioenergy is a significant opportunity for our province. I believe it for the wood that's in the pine beetle spectrum. I believe it in the northwest, where we have a huge amount of decadent forest that could be turned into electricity and shipped and manufactured onto the grid for people and create jobs on our forest floor and help us to revitalize our forests.

[1710]

As we do that, we would be able to actually take that significant opportunity to be able to change the future for a lot of communities across B.C. as we deal with bioenergy as a future resource for British Columbia.

As I close, I want to say again how honoured I am for the last 14 years to have served my community as their MLA and how proud I am of my community — which I refer to as the volunteer capital of Canada because, every time I turn around, hundreds and thousands of volunteers step up to the plate and do great things in that community.

Mr. Speaker, I'm proud of this throne speech, I'm proud of the opportunity you've given me here today, and thank you to the members opposite for listening.

**S. Simpson:** I am pleased to have the opportunity to rise in my place and join the debate on the throne.

To start with, I'm really pleased to have the opportunity to speak to another throne and to again express my appreciation and gratitude to the people of Vancouver-Hastings, my constituency, for the opportunity to continue in this place as their representative.

It's a remarkable community. It's one that I've lived most of my life in and that I certainly have an affection and an affinity for that goes much deeper than my job here as the MLA. It's always a great privilege for me to have the opportunity to come to this place and stand and speak on behalf of the people of Vancouver-Hastings, as I'm sure it is for every member to come and speak on behalf of their constituencies.

This is an interesting time. We're here for three short days before we take a break for the Olympics and then come back at the beginning of March to debate the budget and get on with the work of the Legislature. It's interesting that we're here for these days. Of course, the hype and the excitement in the province and mostly, I would say, in the Lower Mainland, but certainly across the province where the torch has been.... It's clearly been great excitement there as well.

The excitement is growing — there's no doubt about it — about the coming Olympics in a couple of days that will open in Vancouver and continue over the next 17 days, primarily in Vancouver, Richmond and Whistler.

It is a time that I know that everybody in this House is hopeful will be successful for Canada and for our athletes, and that the investments we've made in our athletes will lead to great success at the podium in terms of results for the Olympics.

I think that most, if not all, of us are fans of the Olympics, of the sports of the Olympics, and it's great to have the opportunity to watch the Olympians, these young men and women — primarily young men and women — who are achieving remarkable accomplishments in athletics and who do that in a way as such proud representatives of Canada.

We all can be very appreciative of that and cheer them on, and I'm sure we will. I'm sure that we're all confident — and, I think, confident with some good reason — that we'll have a great performance among our athletes at the Olympics.

I know there have been lots of people excited about the torch. I know that the torch is not coming into my constituency, but that's okay. I have a couple of venues in my constituency, and I must say that many of my neighbours are pretty excited that figure skating and short-track speed skating are there in the constituency.

They're not all so excited about some of the reasons they can't drive their cars around anymore or get down the streets they usually travel down, but all of that aside, they're pretty excited about those events. Certainly, having those venues there has made the Olympics very evident for people in that community.

Also, VANOC has their offices in my constituency. As I was by there the other day on some other business, you certainly could see the electricity bopping off the top of the VANOC building as they were getting this ready to go.

[1715]

The Olympics are going to be, hopefully, a great time and hopefully successful, because we certainly have invested billions and billions of dollars to make them work. I hope that the investment pays off well and that we move on with some success.

Having said that, I guess, when I look at the throne speech and what we heard yesterday around the throne speech, there was something that was concerning. The concern about the throne speech is that it really offered nothing of substance in terms of a plan for after the 28th of February. It offered nothing in terms of a plan of where we go.

That's the concern that I, quite frankly, have heard for the last couple of years from British Columbians. The concern has been that we've had a government that has been fairly single-minded in its focus on the Olympics — it's understandable, the attention to the Olympics, but pretty single-minded on that attention to the Olympics — and seemed to be myopic in terms of their inability to think past that as to where British Columbia goes after the 28th of February.

The throne speech clearly was evidence of that. It was a pretty sad document all in all, a pretty sad commentary on a government that's been around for ten years to have that be the speech. It really was an opportunity lost. That's pretty clear. It really delivered and offered nothing new.

It talked, as the speeches are wont to do.... It seemed to go back and revisit a number of things that we've had visited for us in previous speeches. Within the first page or two, I think, we were on to the five great goals again. Of course, we've heard the great goals time and time again. The only thing that hasn't come out of the goals is that we haven't realized any of the goals. In fact, all we've seen is failure on goal after goal, but that's been the story of this government. It has been failure on goal after goal. Rhetoric without substance would be this government.

There was, of course, the talk again.... In this document we again revisited the new relationship. We know what's happened to the new relationship with first nations: it's collapsed. It collapsed because the government was prepared to put a couple of pages of paper together but clearly was not prepared to move forward on that and create substantive change around that. Because of that, the frustrations of our first nations have become clearer, as many of them have turned their back on that process because the government failed them.

We, of course, had the Conversation on Health. We had the health budget or the health throne speech in one throne speech. The government invested the better part of \$3 million in having a conversation on health, and it would be pretty hard-pressed to find out where that conversation went.

We'd be pretty hard-pressed to know where any of that discussion went, because it's been buried as deep as possible. I suspect it's because what the government heard from British Columbians was not what the government wanted to hear. So they buried that document and buried those comments deep.

That's very unfortunate, because we all know that the challenge of health care is very real. We know the challenge of determining how to deal with this policy area that absorbs 40-odd percent of our budget and of how we move forward and effect changes around health care that work for British Columbians. It really is a discussion that needs to be had. Unfortunately, it's a discussion that the government chose to bury.

Then, of course — I guess it was in 2007 — the government had the throne speech around climate change. There's still some discussion to be had on that, but I think the most telling thing to date — I believe it was in the last year — has been that we saw that industrial emissions topped out in British Columbia. I think we in British Columbia led the country in increases in industrial emissions, so that tells you how sincere that effort around climate change was by this government. It was more rhetoric without substance.

British Columbians understand that, and I think they're understanding that reality more and more. It happened, of course, post-election when the government told British Columbians one thing about what the deficit would be and then created a deficit that was five times that size, and when the government promised British Columbians in writing and told British Columbians there would be no HST and, of course, immediately reversed their position and introduced an HST.

British Columbians are getting wise. They're getting pretty wise about how believable this government is and how much they can have faith in the government to do the things that they say they will do or to accomplish the things that they say they've accomplished when you really look at the empirical evidence that supports it. It's created real frustration.

[1720]

We had a rehash of promises, and we had a number of other things that were in the throne speech. What we saw was a clear message for everybody to brace themselves for March 2 and significant increases in cuts to services. The honeymoon — the party — will end on the 28th of February, and two days later the pain will start with the budget on March 2, when more cuts come.

We heard about more privatization — privatization in health care delivery, privatization around education. All of these rumblings. We'll wait and see what that all means in a few short weeks. But that's coming.

We heard talk about property tax reform, and we'll have to look and see whether that means another way for the B.C. Liberals to download onto local governments. That's probably what we have.

We of course heard about the HST. It's quite remarkable. What we heard is exactly the same defence that the government was giving days after they announced the HST, at a time when arguably the Finance Minister would have had us believe that this all was sprung upon them with days' notice. Somehow they negotiated this in a matter of weeks or days, but they hadn't sorted out all the business around what the real economic arguments for this were.

The remarkable thing is that we had a throne speech that did nothing to reinforce or support the feeble arguments of the B.C. Liberals before, at that time. Now that they've had months and months to do that work, we still heard these feeble arguments about how it was good for the economy, with nothing to substantiate or back that up.

The reality of what we know about the HST is this. It is a tax shift. It is a tax shift that takes \$1.9 billion of basically corporate-related taxes and moves those taxes to consumers and to small businesses, primarily in the service sectors. So it does that.

The tax is said to be revenue-neutral, so it wouldn't garner any more dollars for health care and education supports, but that isn't even accurate. Now what we start

to learn is that it will generate maybe as much as \$400 million less than current taxes. So we move \$1.9 billion of tax burden onto consumers and small businesses in the service sector, and we take \$400 million out of government revenues to pay for health care and education. If that isn't incompetent bungling, then I don't know what is. That's what we're dealing with here.

British Columbians are angry about that. They're angry about it because most British Columbians have the common sense to know that that makes no sense at all.

The other thing that British Columbians know is that they like to be told the truth. They know that this government, during the election, told them.... The B.C. Liberal Party told them. The Premier, when he was running for re-election, the Finance Minister, and every member of this executive council were telling them: "No HST."

You couldn't even have enough time to blink before the HST was on the table afterwards. Why was it on the table? It goes back to the mismanagement and fiscal incompetence of the Liberals around the budget, where the other story that was told, of course, was \$485 million — not a penny more — of deficit. Best managers in the world.

However: "Oops. Excuse me. Going to be \$3½ billion. We'd better do something about this." The federal government waves \$1.6 billion in front of the province. It excludes any thought or consideration of actually looking responsibly at the economy and at our tax policy and grabs the money.

It says: "Well, at least maybe we can use that money — not to deal with the transition that the money was supposed to be for, but we'll grab that money to figure out how to weasel this deficit down under \$3 billion, because we're embarrassed enough about how incompetent and bungling we look and are that we'll try to drive that down a bit so that we don't look quite as bad as we truly are."

The \$1.6 billion was the payoff. Unfortunately for British Columbians, that money will all be gone in two or three years. We will still face the results of that, and the money will be gone.

[1725]

The other things that we heard about in the throne speech.... Of course, we heard some very scary things about education in terms of reductions in school boards, about privatization around early childhood education. We heard concerning things about how education will get responded to, and we'll have to wait a few weeks to see what the results of that are.

I know there are communities around this province today that have school boards, boards of education, that are starting to wonder whether they will still have a board of education in a year's time or whether those will be abolished — whether the government is going to move to take control of that or to consolidate those boards and reduce the democratic process in terms of

their ability to work with elected people around the futures of their children.

All of this is done, and more of the language that the Premier and his ministers are well known for is to talk about.... This is one of the good ones. The goal is now set for 2030. We've had the decade that was going to be complete in 2015. We've had numerous dates. This government pops up a new date periodically, but now we're out to 2030.

I suppose the executive council cabinet sat down around the table and said: "Okay, let's look at everybody. What's the date that we can be sure none of us will be here to be held accountable for having misrepresented this issue again?" They picked 2030. That was the date to set as the goal, because none of them will be around by then to be held accountable for the gibberish they put in that throne speech.

The throne speech was a sad document, but the other area where the throne speech was very painful is in what wasn't there. The throne speech did not talk to our most vulnerable citizens. It did not talk to poverty with children, poverty with families. It did not talk to homelessness.

The reality in this province.... I heard the Minister of Housing and Social Development, who just spoke previously, talking about homelessness and talking about housing. I'm sure the Minister of Housing and Social Development.... The throne speech was a sad day for him, because his ministry got thrown under the bus by the Premier yesterday. There's no doubt about that.

There was nothing in that speech for homelessness, nothing for social housing, nothing for families, nothing for poverty. What do we have? We have a reality that there are half a million people in this province living in poverty — half a million British Columbians, and 140,000 of those are kids. These are 2007 numbers, and the economy in 2007 looked a lot better than it looks today. We can only believe that those numbers have grown exponentially and that they are much larger today.

We have a half a million people living in poverty in this province, almost a third of them children. We have 15,000 homeless people in this province and untold thousands and thousands more who are right on the bubble. They're couch-surfing, they're living in seriously inadequate housing, and they're living from one paycheque to one paycheque to keep a roof over their head. They have no security. They have no future around their housing.

We have significant numbers of people in shelters, and shelters are not housing. Shelters are the last resort — important, no doubt, but the last resort. They do not constitute housing, and the government has done very, very little. The government and the minister, as we learned in estimates last year, clearly have turned their back on family housing and on building housing for families.

Let's be clear. When we talk about the highest rates of child poverty six years running in this country in our province, kids don't get poor by themselves. Poor kids are about poor families, and those families are getting no support — no support at all.

The other reality we know is that half those families don't collect a welfare cheque. They're on a minimum-wage paycheque. They have a paycheque that comes into the house.

The reality, though, is that this is a government that has slashed taxes for their corporate friends, has cut taxes across the board on others, has seen costs skyrocket but has found no reason, since the day they were elected in 2001, to give one penny — not one penny — to low-wage workers. They have turned their back on low-wage workers completely and entirely. That's the legacy of this government and how it treats vulnerable British Columbians.

[1730]

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

Hon. Speaker, it's a sad day. It's a sad day for the ministry that I'm a critic of, Housing and Social Development. As I said, clearly the government has thrown that ministry under the bus. I'm sure that the minister — who, all indications are, is looking to build himself a strong and good profile these days — is a little desperate about the fact that maybe that's been damaged. But that's for another day's discussion.

The throne speech offers nothing in terms of a plan post-Olympics. The fears of British Columbians are that they are going to be left behind after February 28, that the hurt all comes then. For example, in the area of housing — it's a remarkable area — from 2001 to 2007 the government does absolutely nothing for housing in this province. In 2007 somebody turns the switch on a couple of years before the Olympics, when the reality of the embarrassment starts to become clearer, and they buy some SROs. They build a few units of seniors housing and build a few units of assisted living.

The interesting thing is that I talk to people around this province who are close watchers of the housing situation in this province. Person after person says to me that their greatest fear is that as quick as that tap got turned on in 2007 to make sure they would have something to say about housing and the desperate treatment of people who are vulnerable in this province, that tap will be turned off just as quickly days after the Olympics are over.

We'll see on March 2 whether those concerns are realized. My fear is that those concerns will be realized. That will be the reality — that the modest amount that has been done for housing will become non-existent, essentially, after we get to the second of March. So we have to be concerned here.

What is very clear to us on this side and what is clear to British Columbians in this province and becoming more evident to British Columbians across this province is that the B.C. Liberals truly have run out of gas as a political party, that they have no leadership anymore — their leadership has lost interest after February 28 and is prepared to take a pass — and that they are floundering as a political party. The infighting is starting in this party, and it's becoming clear.

The broken promises continue — broken promise after broken promise. The mismanagement continues, and the incompetence at the level of the executive council is unprecedented in this province. March 2 will clearly announce the end of the celebration, and we will all hopefully enjoy the next 17 to 18 days as the Olympics come and we have a good time — and hopefully huge success for Canada's athletes during that period. Unfortunately, on the second of March it will hit with a thud.

As we know, with most throne speeches, the throne speech comes and it goes. The reality comes with the budget. The budget is a few weeks away. People are holding their breath for that. As British Columbians, we'll have to live with the result of a government that is out of ideas, is out of control and is out of touch. We can only hope — and we will do what we can do on this side to mitigate the damage — to try to hold this government to account as it bungles its way through the next couple of years.

Hopefully, in due course the changes will occur that British Columbians now are realizing, had they been told the truth in May of last year, should have occurred then. But sadly, they weren't told the truth. They were told something quite different. They voted based on what they were told. In community after community they've woken up to the realization that what they thought they were getting, they didn't get with the B.C. Liberals. It's sad, and it's unfortunate.

I look forward to continuing the debate here for one more day or so. I look forward to going and enjoying the Olympics and, hopefully, a great Canadian success over the next couple of weeks that we can all celebrate.

[1735]

I do look forward very much to being back here in about three weeks' time and having the opportunity, come March 1, when we all come together in this place again to start the serious debate that will occur then on what the future of this province looks like over the next near term — a time when the economy is still in serious trouble; a time when what talk there is of recovery is talk of a jobless recovery; a time when community after community around this province is still in very, very serious shape and has very serious concerns about what their futures hold for them; a time when community services in this province that had their money ripped away from them after the last election are looking in hopes that maybe some of those dollars will be put back, dollars that

they certainly believe were committed to them through gaming dollars and other dollars; a time when parents across this province are concerned about the future of their kids and the future in their classrooms; a time when health care is facing a very difficult challenge.

All of these are the issues that we will face over the next short period of time. They will be the issues that we'll debate in this place over the coming months, starting on the first of March or the second of March after the budget.

We'll get the opportunity to see at that time whether the government has any ideas. We'll get the opportunity to see whether the fluff and the modest rhetoric out of the throne speech actually result in any kind of legislative program that will do anything for British Columbians.

That future is in front of us. We can only hope that the government will see fit to restore some of the funding and think twice about the cuts that are inevitably coming and that they're trying to prepare people for.

Our hope is that the government will maybe come to its senses and pay some attention to the good advice that they're getting from many sources, I'm sure — that this is the last time and the wrong time to be taking services away from British Columbians, to be taking services away from communities, to be compromising the future of communities in order to look to spend a few less dollars at a time when we actually need to support our communities and support our citizens in ways that they unfortunately haven't been supported for the last number of years.

Hon. Speaker, I look forward to that discussion, and I look forward to continued debate on the throne speech.

**Hon. I. Chong:** I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

### Introductions by Members

**Hon. I. Chong:** Today I am very pleased to introduce a team here who will be competing in the Olympics, and I've heard many speak about the Olympics in the last little while.

I would like to introduce Mr. Li Dongyan, who is the team leader and secretary general of the Chinese Curling Association. We also have the national coach, coaches and players of the men's and women's Chinese Olympic curling teams. They've just come to the buildings here. I know they've been in British Columbia at various locations practising and training, and I'm sure they will put on an excellent match, whoever they're going to be competing against.

They are here currently in the gallery, taking a view of what goes on in our parliamentary chambers. I would ask the whole House to make them very welcome.

### Debate Continued

**Hon. G. Abbott:** It's a pleasure to rise and join in the throne speech debate. Hopefully, I can provide a brief holiday from some of the unrelenting pessimism that we sometimes hear from the other side of the House — hopefully some thoughtful, constructive moments here. Already I'm hearing a response even to the brief introduction to my speech, so I very much welcome that.

I'd like at the outset to say thank you again to my constituents in Shuswap for providing me the honour to represent them in this Legislature. I've had that opportunity now since 1996. It's something that I'm very appreciative of.

[1740]

I think it is a very exciting time for all of us on both sides of the House to be Members of the Legislative Assembly. It is, I think, a dynamic time in the history of this province and an awesome opportunity and an awesome honour for us to be a part of that.

I think it's also a particularly exciting time to be a Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation in this province, and I'm deeply, deeply appreciative of that honour. It is an exciting time for a number of reasons, and in my throne speech response I want to articulate why I think this can be a particularly exciting, dynamic and constructive time in building our relationship with first nations in the province.

Others have mentioned — and I think it's important to note this at the outset — that in just a couple of days we will be hosting the world as the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games come to Vancouver and Whistler and British Columbia and Canada. It's a very exciting time, and it's going to be exciting for many, many reasons.

One of the reasons why I think it is particularly special and particularly exciting for us in British Columbia is that for the first time in Olympic history, we see these Olympic Games being co-hosted by first nations in British Columbia. I think that is very, very exciting.

I want to extend my congratulations to the Musqueam, the Squamish, the Tsleil-Waututh, the Lil'wat — the four host first nations — who have done an absolutely terrific job in building that partnership with VANOC and extending their hands with VANOC in inviting the world to British Columbia and Canada to enjoy these Olympic Games.

I know, as all members of the House have said, these are going to be very exciting weeks ahead. I also think that as the four host first nations, they would want to invite all of the members of the House to come and visit the aboriginal showcase. It's down at the Queen Elizabeth Theatre on West Georgia.

It is going to be one of the great focal points of these Olympic Games. There will be entertainment, culture and art from not only British Columbia first nations but first nations all across the nation and from the Inuit in the north as well. It's going to be an exciting time.

We believe that it will also be a springboard for additional economic opportunity and other cultural opportunities for first nations in this province, so it's going to be an exciting time.

I also want to begin my comments today by talking about an event just a few days ago which, for me, was personally very moving and very exciting and supportive of what we're trying to do in this province. That event was last Friday, having the opportunity to sit down with Chief Robert Hope of the Yale First Nation and federal negotiators to initial the Yale treaty.

That was a great day for the Yale First Nation but also a great day for British Columbia. We have not enjoyed the kind of success on either with any government since 1989 in terms of successes in the treaty process, and the initialling of the Yale First Nation treaty was a very important milestone in terms of the progress on the treaty front.

I want to salute Chief Hope and all of the members of the Yale First Nation and congratulate them on the successful negotiation of a final agreement.

One of the things that I found very moving in the ceremony and celebration that accompanied the initialling was that Chief Hope took the time to introduce every young member, every child member, of the Yale First Nation who was present at the ceremony.

[1745]

He was making the point that the reason why the Yale First Nation had worked so hard and so constructively to negotiate a treaty with British Columbia and Canada was that they wanted to provide new opportunities for the children of the Yale First Nation. I think Chief Hope was exactly right in that. That is the reason why, through treaties and other mechanisms, this government works tirelessly — and I know other governments work tirelessly — to try to build new opportunities for first nations in this province.

Treaties, of course, are not the only path forward. There are many paths forward, and we've been trying to build additional paths that can take us towards new economic opportunity and new social and other opportunities for first nations as well. I'll want to talk a little bit about those paths.

I also want to talk about the reason why we undertake treaties and other agreements. They are to narrow those absolutely unacceptable social and economic gaps that exist between first nations in this province and other British Columbians. Whether it is in the area of health, education, economic opportunity.... Across the board, pretty much, we see very unacceptable gaps between the hopes and the realization of aspirations of first nations versus those of other British Columbians.

One of the axioms that has been present in political dialogue for probably well over 200 years now is the notion of equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity is always a laudable goal and a laudable principle, but I

don't believe that in any jurisdiction in the world at any time in the history of the world have we had genuine equality of opportunity among all the citizens that live in that jurisdiction.

I believe that over the next two decades, in fact, British Columbia has that opportunity to realize genuine equality of opportunity. There is much work to be done to achieve that, but I believe that some of the paths we have articulated forward will assist us in achieving that very lofty and very laudable goal.

I want to reflect for a moment on the history of this province, particularly in relation to first nations and some of the challenges that have come out of that sometimes shameful history over the past 150 years of relationship between governments and first nations.

When my family first came to Canada, which is probably now close to 200 years ago on both my father's and mother's sides, they had many opportunities in Canada over those 200 years. In the 1800s my family, on both the Abbott and the Melbourne side, made very good use, for example, of what is termed pre-emption, which is the opportunity to take up a homestead — in the case of the Abbotts in what was then the Northwest Territories, now Saskatchewan; in the case of the Melbournes in Manitoba.

Right across Canada the opportunity to pre-empt, to take up at minimal or no cost a substantial piece of homestead, was something that was specifically excluded from first nations. While my family had the opportunity for pre-emption and homesteading and agriculture, Chief Hope's ancestors did not have that opportunity — nor did any other ancestors of first nations in this province or elsewhere in Canada.

In the 1900s my family had the opportunity to work and operate businesses in agriculture, in forestry, in railroading and in other economic activities. Chief Hope's family, by and large, did not have those opportunities — again, this is not only an unfortunate part of our history but a shameful part of our history — while up until about the 1880s first nations, in fact, were pretty much full participants in the economic life of British Columbia.

[1750]

Prof. John Lutz from the University of Victoria has written recently an excellent book called *Makuk* on exactly that issue. What the Lutz book does, I think, is lay out very effectively and very dramatically how, from that period in the 1880s, first nations were very much involved in forestry, in fishing, in agriculture, in all of the economic enterprises in the province. Between the 1880s, when we started to see an influx of European or Canadian and American settlers into British Columbia, that started to change — and change very dramatically.

As a consequence of acts of this provincial Legislature and of the federal parliament, what we saw was often the systematic exclusion of first nations from those economic activities which they had previously enjoyed. The

legislators who sat in this chamber before us, 100 years ago or more, were not evil or vindictive people. They were legislators who reflected the prejudices and biases of the time. As a consequence — again, sadly, retrospectively at least — it led to some very real injustices in our society over those 150 years.

I know that we can't remediate history through acts of the contemporary Legislature and parliament, but we can certainly learn from history. We can identify new ways of building stronger, better relationships with the first nations in our province.

Notwithstanding some of the disparaging remarks which have been made by some in this chamber, I'm very proud of the work that has been done to build a new and better relationship with first nations in British Columbia. *The New Relationship* document, as an example, lays out the foundation of what I think has become a constructive government-to-government relationship between the province and first nations in this province.

The transformative change accord, where the federal government was also a partner, is a vital foundation document in building that better relationship between governments and first nations.

Because both of those documents are high-level documents that seek to create a better relationship and lay out some of the elements in a better relationship, the question then is: how do we proceed from those documents to actually building a better relationship, a more constructive relationship, better conditions, better results on the ground?

There are a number of tools or mechanisms that we can utilize to achieve those goals. Among them — and clearly a most important one — are treaties. Again, we've seen relatively few successes on the treaty front. The Nisga'a treaty was the first modern treaty that was successful. Since then we have seen Maa-nulth on western Vancouver Island, and Tsawwassen of course in Metro Vancouver.

As I mentioned earlier, Yale is the most recent example of a treaty that appears to be moving forward. It has yet to receive community ratification, but I think all parties are confident that that can occur.

Treaties are important and vital, but it is the view of our government that we need to reach out and build relationships with first nations quite apart from those who may be involved in treaty processes. For example, over half of British Columbia's first nations are not involved in treaty at all. Where I come from, in the interior of British Columbia, the Shuswap area, there is probably no band within 150 kilometres of Shuswap that is involved in treaty discussions.

[1755]

It's important, whether bands are in treaty or wish to enter into treaty at some future point, that we try to find ways that we can assist in building constructive partnerships and relationships with those first nations in the

years ahead, whether they're interested in treaties ultimately or not.

Some of the recent successes are notable. The successful agreement around a reconciliation protocol with the Haida First Nation is, I think, a very important step forward for what we now are going to refer to as Haida Gwaii and the people there. The Haida had been involved for some years in litigation against the province of British Columbia and Canada. We had direction from the Supreme Court of Canada a few years ago that the court case should go into abeyance and that the parties should attempt to achieve a reconciliation agreement between the Haida and government. That is what we were able to achieve in the Haida reconciliation protocol.

At the same time, or near the same time, there were six northern coastal first nations that used to be referred to as Turning Point and now are together in a grouping which is not only for the purposes of the reconciliation protocol but also a grouping along with the Haida in an economic development corporation which aims to build new opportunities for the first nations of Haida and north coast not only on forestry but on shellfish aquaculture, tourism, hydroelectric.

Right across the board, they are trying to build new investment opportunities, new job opportunities, new training opportunities for their citizens. That, I think, is not only constructive and commendable, but absolutely the right way forward for first nations in the province of British Columbia.

It's been remarkable in the brief period.... I guess we signed off in early December on the reconciliation protocols with the Haida and with the northern coastal first nations. There's been enormous interest from other first nations in British Columbia about those reconciliation protocols since that time. I hope it is part of the turning of a corner in respect of these important issues.

A third path forward for first nations and for the province is the strategic engagement agreement. My friend and colleague the Minister of Forests and Range and his team at Forests and the integrated land management branch worked strenuously towards concluding a strategic engagement agreement with the Nanwakolas group of first nations. These are six first nations on the south and central coast of British Columbia.

Again, what's contained in the strategic engagement agreement, as is the case in the reconciliation protocols, is a form or a model of shared decision-making between those first nations and the province of British Columbia. It is a form of shared decision-making which, again, has enormous potential for other areas of British Columbia and I think is a great step forward.

What it does is build this, again, stronger constructive relationship around issue resolution that has not been the case before — a very exciting step forward. It adds to our toolkit of ways that we can work with first nations in British Columbia.

A final form of partnership, which, again, has been used relatively few times to date in the province so far but which I hope over the years ahead will become increasingly commonplace, is the economic development agreements.

[1800]

As an example, we have an agreement with two first nations, the Skeetchestn and Kamloops bands, on a revenue-sharing agreement on the New Afton mine — an exciting opportunity for those first nations, for New Afton mine and for the province of British Columbia, and a great example of how first nations can have a working partnership.

We have the economic benefits agreement in the treaty 8 area in the northeast of British Columbia. That's again a big step forward as we see the treaty first nations benefit from revenue-sharing from the oil and gas industries. All of those are important elements in a better, constructive relationship.

Shared decision-making is an element of all of those kinds of agreements, shared revenue models. In every case, whether it's treaties, reconciliation protocol, strategic engagement agreement or economic development agreement, the aim is to enhance the opportunity that first nations and aboriginal British Columbians have on the land base.

Again, there's much work that needs to be done. History does not place us in a great position in terms of how much economic participation there has been on the resource and land base in British Columbia in the past, but I think that all of those are foundation pieces to build that much greater participation and partnership by first nations in the future.

As government moves forward and identifies and better articulates what those opportunities look like, I think we can learn a lot from what industry has already done in the province of British Columbia, whether it's partnerships between forest companies and first nations, like Meadow Lake — a good example of a forestry partnership — or oil and gas. Certainly there are many very good partnership examples from the northeast of British Columbia, whether it's Shell Oil or BP or others that have done a very good job of engaging with and building partnerships with first nations in the treaty 8 area.

Also on mining, I mentioned New Afton as an example of where we can go on revenue-sharing and partnership in the future on mines. I think that there's lots to be done there. I think one of the very exciting areas in terms of potential partnerships is the green energy area — small hydroelectric and larger hydroelectric partnerships.

I'll cite as an example one that I think is particularly constructive. That is the partnership that was concluded, I think, probably about a year ago now between Plutonic Power and the Klahoose First Nation with respect to their green hydroelectric development on the Toba Inlet.

The elements in that Plutonic-Klahoose partnership include not only direct employment, but also contracting opportunities on roadbuilding and land clearing. The Klahoose operate the cafeteria and the boarding area of the project. There's also, I think, work being done to conclude equity participation by the Klahoose in the Plutonic project as well.

A final note, and I think this is a particularly important part of this partnership that's been concluded. The Klahoose, Plutonic and North Island College are working together to provide training programs for young members of the Klahoose First Nation. They are learning a range of skills through North Island College, which will ensure that they are active participants in the workforce for the balance of their working years. I think that is just a terrific step ahead and a very exciting step ahead.

[1805]

These are some of the examples that government can support, that government can build on, that can help ensure that as we move further into the 21st century we see more and more that first nations are very much partners on the land and on land use decisions.

The aim of government, I believe, should be to build workable models for land use decisions in British Columbia. We have, and I mentioned the Haida litigation, but there are dozens and dozens of cases over the past 20 years where first nations have attempted to remedy what they believe to be injustices by legal challenge, by having litigation at a variety of courts. To date, the court cases go this way and that way, but I don't believe that there have been the substantive gains, from a socio-economic perspective, for first nations from all of that legal enterprise.

We believe that if we can resolve these matters outside the court processes, outside of litigation, everyone benefits from building partnerships rather than fighting these things out in court.

We've learned a lot as a province over the last couple of decades about consultation and, where appropriate, accommodation of first nations' interests on the land base. I think we've gotten much better about understanding what we need to do in terms of consultation and accommodation. I think that the building of partnerships is, in fact, incrementally a way to build again on the whole business of consultation and accommodation.

Hopefully, we will see first nations in the future not regarded as a potential barrier to new development but rather as potential partners to new development on the land base in British Columbia. I think that's already happening, and I think this will be the exciting way of the future — to see more and more of those kinds of partnerships being facilitated on the land base.

In terms of land use decision-making, is there a better way than legal challenge, which has been too often the way in which interests have been asserted and at times resolved on the land base? Well, I think there is a better way.

As I mentioned, there are models in both Haida and north coastal that provide the certainty that all parties need, provide timelines and provide a consistency with land use plans. I think all of that puts us in a great position in terms of building partnerships.

I think all members of this House should look forward with great optimism to the future. This is a great province that has been richly blessed by a great range of natural resources. We have a great strategic position in relation to Asia, in relation to the United States and in relation to other trading partners.

The role of government, I believe, in the decade ahead is to ensure that we do our part to build the economic base. Further, I think that for first nations we do have a genuine opportunity in 2010, and in the years, in the decade and in two decades ahead we have a great opportunity to make first nations a full partner in our economy and to see a realization of genuine equality of opportunity.

**L. Krog:** I'm delighted to follow the Minister of Aboriginal Relations in response to the throne speech of the second session of the 39th parliament. I'm very moved by his remarks about how all members must look forward with great optimism. I would say, looking at the polling numbers, I can assure the hon. member that all of us in the opposition look forward with great optimism, particularly to 2013. Indeed, optimism is just bountiful on this side of the House — bountiful.

[1810]

On the other side of the House, though, I'm not quite sure that optimism is a feeling that filters entirely through the government side.

I was in court this morning. Now, I know that the members on the other side — their ears are pricked up — are wondering if I'm doing a little night work on the side. I had the pleasure to be over there in Vancouver this morning, listening to the announcement of the trial date for the B.C. Rail corruption trial — a train that will finally leave the station, so to speak. I just want to say to the members opposite that I think that British Columbians look forward to that trial, look forward to finally getting to the truth behind the great broken promise of this government.

We all recall that in 1996 the present Premier, the then Leader of the Opposition, promised that he was going to sell B.C. Rail. What happened? Didn't win the election. Indeed, all those seats that were impacted by B.C. Rail elected New Democrats. Glen Clark pulled it out of the bag, so to speak.

In 2001 the then Leader of the Opposition, the present Premier, promised that he wouldn't sell B.C. Rail. Almost as fast as his little tracks could carry him, this government turned around and engaged in a process that led to the disposition of one of the Crown jewels of W.A.C. Bennett's legacy to this province, which was B.C. Rail.

At the very time — with resource prices rising, the world economy improving — the opportunity was for that railway to return even more benefits to the people of British Columbia, to whom it rightfully belonged, than ever before in, probably, its entire history.

What we have today in front of us is another throne speech. It's not quite like a campaign speech or a campaign promise. Those get broken regularly by this government. After all, we heard great promises about no HST. It wasn't even on the government's radar. I must say that if the government is being entirely accurate in that, they really need to get some good radar technicians in there working for them, because it was on their radar pretty clearly for most of us — somewhere, at least, on their radar.

But the speech. We've got this wonderful line: "A new budget will set the foundation for the province we want in 2030." You know, even old Joe Stalin was satisfied with a five-year plan. This government has got a 20-year plan. We're not satisfied with Joe Stalin's example. We want to go for the full 20, two full decades of promises that the Liberals will surely deliver on with the same — how shall I say? — strength of conviction with which they delivered on all their other promises in the last eight years.

It even talks about a new agenda — the brave new world, a new agenda. I am so moved by those words, so moved. You know, it's like the twice-turned or thrice-turned dresses of the Dickens novel. We just keep turning it inside out and turning it back again and turning it inside out and trotting it out once again and pretending it's all new.

What happened to the great golden goals? Where did they go? I didn't hear mention of them in this speech. What happened to the promise about making British Columbia the most literate jurisdiction in the world? What happened to all of those things?

You know, for most British Columbians the expectation that they have of their government isn't really that high. This is what they expect. They expect government to levy taxes fairly, to make sure that those who earn more pay a little more than those who earn less. They expect government to provide education and hospitals and roads. They also expect — and they've always expected this — that government will do something about the poorest amongst us.

[1815]

That's what people expect. It's not unreasonable. I mean, after all, T.C. Douglas said it best: "We expect to do through government collectively what we cannot accomplish individually." Because none of us wants to live in a world where you pay tolls on roads everywhere so that the only people who get to use the roads are the people who can afford to pay the tolls. We don't want to live in a jurisdiction where you only get medical help if you can afford to pay for it.

I'm not suggesting for a moment that the members opposite want to live in that kind of a world. We want to live in a world where there is some social and economic justice.

I appreciate the housing that's coming to my community. I'm looking at the former minister of.... I'm looking at the Minister of Housing now, as we say. Perhaps I was looking into the future. I'm grateful for what this government has done.

But by every measure, we know that in eight years, through some of the most prosperous times in British Columbia's history, they have failed miserably. The rate of homelessness in this province is the highest it's been in such a very, very long time, perhaps since the Dirty '30s. We know that for the sixth year in a row, we have the highest rate of child poverty in this country. As everyone points out, I hate that term, as do many British Columbians.

British Columbians understand that child poverty is just one of the worst red herrings in terms of description. We know that children don't live in isolation. They live in poor families.

It is so bad that an independent officer of this Legislature has called upon a committee of this House to do something, to set goals. That's how bad it's been.

Now, we have listened to this government brag over and over again about the lowest taxes and the lowest corporate tax rates and the lowest this and the lowest that. There is not a member in this House, I would hope, nor a British Columbian alive who wouldn't like to hear this government brag about the lowest child poverty rate in Canada.

The government mensches can cheer on and pound their little desks, but they can't get past that inescapable fact that in eight years one of the basic things that British Columbians expect from government, which is the alleviation of poverty.... They, in a time when they had every opportunity to do so, consistently, wilfully turned a blind eye to the poor in this province.

We've got the lowest minimum wage in the country. Let's talk about people who are not on assistance. Let's just talk about the people who are out there working, who are able to work. The lowest minimum wage in the country, with a \$6 training wage on top of it.

I listened with interest earlier when the Minister of Housing spoke about his adventures in Ottawa in 1970. I informed him afterwards that I was there too. I was a Rotary student from Qualicum Beach. In those days you felt pretty good being a British Columbian, because you knew that back there in the east in the maritime provinces things were tough.

You knew that Newfoundland was a pretty tough place to grow up in. You felt sorry for the folks back east. You were proud of the fact that you belonged to a nation, however, that engaged in some social programs that tried to alleviate that poverty, that tried to bring Newfoundland up.

Here today in 2010 in British Columbia I am living in a province with the lowest minimum wage in the country. If you'd told me 40 years ago that at this time and in this place I'd be standing in this House talking about British Columbia having the highest rate of child poverty in the country and the lowest minimum wage, I wouldn't have believed you. I wouldn't have believed you. W.A.C. Bennett, in his darkest days — and gosh knows, W.A.C. Bennett was centre right, not centre left — would never have tolerated this.

[1820]

When I heard the Minister of Aboriginal Relations talking about the state of poverty for aboriginals in this province, I was moved by what he had to say, because he's exactly right. But as this government goes about doing its best, I hope, to work with first nations, I want to remind the minister and the members of this House that probably half the aboriginal population lives off reserve.

They don't get the benefits of even the minuscule steps that we have taken as a province to try and lift first nations out of poverty. Chief Doug White was here yesterday for opening day, for the throne speech. He's Doug White III. He's the new Chief of the Snuneymuxw First Nation — a young, bright, articulate lawyer; great hope for Snuneymuxw. I had the great honour and privilege of attending the swearing-in ceremony the other week for him and the new council members.

It struck me that when I first spoke in this House back in 1991, after the first time I was elected here, I talked about how proud I was. I've said this before in this House — how proud I was of a government that was starting us on the road to a genuine treaty process. Again, like I thought 40 years ago and like I thought 19 years ago, I didn't think that we would have moved so very slowly or so little down that road.

We have failed first nations. We've even failed in the patronizing sense of, supposedly, first nations people being this responsibility on the state. We have failed them in every aspect.

I want to say to the Minister of Aboriginal Relations that I hope he works really, really hard in his ministry to do his best for first nations, because when I look at someone like Doug White, who sat in this chamber, and when I look at first nations students in our university system who are excelling, who are providing leadership in their communities, I'd like to think there'll come a day when we won't have to talk about it in this House, where first nations succeeding and excelling and being part of the larger community and achieving the same level of prosperity and education and health as the majority of this population enjoys will be just part of the fundamental truth of what it is to be a British Columbian.

I want to go back to the throne speech. Here's another line: "Modernizes our education system and creates new opportunities for early learning, smarter use of education resources and new choices for students." What does that mean?

**An Hon. Member:** Closing schools.

**L. Krog:** My friend says that it means closing schools. Well, we certainly know that's true. We know they've closed schools across this province. We know we haven't met class sizes. We know that teachers are under increasing pressure in the workplace. We know that a significant portion of the people we trust to educate the next generation.... Many of them are off on short- and long-term disability claims.

We know that public confidence in government as a whole is down from where it used to be. We know that we cannot begin to compete with the emerging economies of India and China on environmental standards or on labour standards. The only way that we compete is if we have a highly educated workforce.

When I hear them talking about modernizing our educational system and creating new opportunities for early learning, I want to know what that means. What does that mean? Does that mean we're going to actually finally do something for children in this province?

Hon. Speaker, I must tell you that you cannot educate a child appropriately, even in the best learning circumstance, if that child is hungry, if they're sitting in a classroom hungry or if they're going home to a family where they're inadequately housed, where their parents don't have sufficient money to clothe them properly.

You can't modernize the education system until you talk about dealing with poverty in this province. I'm not even sure what modernization means, because we've gone through many shifts in the education system over the years.

[1825]

I've watched them as a student, as a parent, as the son of a teacher, as the brother-in-law of a teacher in the system today. What it all really gets back to.... I don't want to go all simplistic here. It gets back to a dedicated, educated, trained teacher in a classroom, working with children who are at least fed, who have the ability to give some attention and to get the care and education they deserve.

When this throne speech talks about new choices for students and then later on talks about working with parents in the private sector about preschool, I just smell more privatization. I smell more job opportunities for low-paid workers. I smell more opportunities to exploit instead of improve.

Government talks about time being money and that duplication is waste and that tax dollars are limited. Some of the other members who've spoken here have already pointed it out — the member for Columbia River-Revelstoke. You can't continue to cut taxes and pretend that you can deliver the same quality of services or, indeed, bring in better and new and enhanced services. It doesn't compute.

British Columbians understand that. They get it; they're not stupid. The electorate understands you can't

get something for nothing. So when you've engaged in a tax-cutting regime for eight years and you've still got the highest rate of child poverty, there's a lesson in those statistics. There's a lesson there. You're not achieving what the Premier has talked about in past throne speeches, what the government has talked about. You're not looking out for children, when those numbers consistently come up year after year.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

This government talks about the success of its public-private partnerships and has sent a resounding message around the world: "We will expand those partnerships with new P3s in transportation, health delivery, education support services, systems management and more."

At the very time when having gone through close to 30 years of a right-wing agenda, a free-market agenda in major western economies, people are starting to see what the fruits of that have given us — greater wealth disparity; crumbling social infrastructure; and crumbling physical infrastructure, bridges and roads — and auditors general in other provinces are empowered to look at public-private partnerships and have determined that there are real issues and problems, what is this government doing? This government is promising more of the same. More of the same.

I get the marketplace. You know, a law office is nothing but a small business. I understand about cash flow and meeting the payroll. I understand about revenue, and I understand about profit. You don't stay in business very long if you don't make a profit. So every time we talk about further privatization, the only way that is going to work for a private company is if they make a profit. And the only way they make a profit, if the service is being delivered by government now, is if wages are cut or service is reduced or some combination thereof.

I come back to the average British Columbian. They get it. They understand. So at the very time, as I say, when others are questioning it, this government continues on the privatization agenda and, indeed, promises more of it. Interesting. They promise more privatization at the very time when the small businesses of British Columbia are being hit with the HST.

I mean, it's kind of the slap and the kiss routine here — isn't it? We're going to assume that more privatization is good for small business — not good for the public, necessarily.

[1830]

But at the same time, you slap on an HST, which the restaurant industry is predicting will cost them 10 per cent of their revenue. It will turn businesses that are marginally profitable today, that are employing people — even at the miserable minimum wage of this province.... It will shut those businesses down. Unbelievable.

If this government was at least consistent, we could have a meaningful debate in this chamber. That would be an unusual thing. I notice the member for New Westminster smiling. She knows the progress that's been made in the federal House, particularly around the use of committees and the way procedures are carried out in the federal House. Lord knows the country looks with some — how shall I say? — mistrust at the way the federal parliament operates.

I understand perogies are being served at various gatherings across the country. We could do something like that here, and then we could maybe have some of these meaningful debates. But you can't have a meaningful debate with somebody who isn't consistent, if there's no philosophical base.

I think this government believes it has a philosophical base. That philosophical base is that government is bad, smaller government is good, the private sector is always successful and always the most efficient way of delivering services.

You know, I don't think the average British Columbian buys that anymore. I think the average British Columbian accepts that the marketplace has its place and government has its place. I come back to Douglas: "We do collectively through government what we cannot do individually."

We talk in this throne speech about a new clean energy act which will encourage new investments in independent power production while also strengthening B.C. Hydro. I come back to consistency — a bit of a theme.

How is it good for the taxpayer to pay exorbitant prices through B.C. Hydro for independently produced power, much of it at the very time of year when we don't need it anyway? How is that good for the taxpayer, and how is increasing investments in that kind of power production going to be good for B.C. Hydro and strengthen it?

British Columbia Hydro provided for decades a significant economic advantage to British Columbia's businesses. At a time when we should have been utilizing its strength, the benefit of the power facilities that generated electricity at some of the lowest rates anywhere in the world, we turned around and we threw Hydro's money away — and it's our money; it's a Crown corporation — to benefit an ill-thought-out privatization power scheme that doesn't produce the very power we need.

Now, if the government had jumped ahead and moved into tidal or wind power that actually had some consistency throughout the course of the year instead of producing power at the very time of year that we don't really need it, then that might have been good policy. But that's not what has happened.

We instead are going to move ahead with further privatization in power, and we're also going to work "in new partnerships with the private sector and parents." Again, I don't get it.

In most British Columbian families — and I use that term in the broadest possible sense — who have children, the parents are out working. That is the reality. The luxury of a parent at home with young children is just that. It's a luxury.

Most British Columbians don't live like that. Most British Columbian parents are out working, trying to meet the rent or the mortgage payment or the car payment or pay for the hydro or put clothes on their kids' backs or pay the school fees for things that used to be covered so their kids can participate fully as students, equally across this province.

[1835]

So what are these new partnerships with the private sector and parents going to be about? Are we going to have already-stressed parents coming into the classroom to assist teachers? Are they going to be working in child care facilities on a volunteer basis? Or are they going to, perhaps, get the benefit of the training wage? Maybe we'll pay them six bucks an hour. There's a thought. We'll pay the parents six bucks an hour to help look after their own kids in these child care facilities.

I know this government cares about children, because further on in the speech it uses this language. "We are adding to our children's debt. We are handing them our problems rather than giving them opportunity." Well, I couldn't agree more. Of the three biggest deficits in the history of the province of British Columbia, this government is responsible for two of them and Social Credit was responsible for the other one.

So if we care about the kids, instead of spending the money on them and lifting them out of poverty for at least one generation, why have we continued to give tax breaks where they weren't even required or requested sometimes? Why have we continued to do that and at the same time voice our incredible concern about adding to our children's debt?

Again, it's this consistency thing. Now, maybe consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds — I think that's an old phrase — and forgive me for harping on about this. But I just want the government to be a bit consistent, because much of what this government says from time to time doesn't make a lot of sense.

They talk about developing industry in the province. They talk about creating jobs. Historically in this province the one sustainable, renewable resource industry we've got, the one that employed thousands and thousands of people in every part of this province, was forestry.

As my former colleague and friend said so eloquently when he was haranguing the Minister of Forests in the spring of 2008, I believe it was: "You've made me nostalgic for Social Credit." I'll never forget that line, "You've made me nostalgic for Social Credit," because never in the history of this province did you have a government who sat back and watched the forest industry go into

the toilet in the way that this government has. It is a shocking abandonment of community, of families and a shocking abandonment of the one industry, as I say, that is sustainable. The trees continue to grow if you look after them. The trees continue to provide jobs.

But, you know, there is a good soul out there in the hearts and the bodies of British Columbians. I believe they expect more and want more from government. I believe that some day they'll actually get something out of government, instead of rhetoric.

In some respects I feel sorry for this government at this stage in its mandate. Everything they've done has sort of blown up in their faces now. It just hasn't turned out the way it was supposed to.

The sale of B.C. Rail is now going to trial. Child poverty hasn't disappeared. The deficit is as big as it's ever been — bigger. They've got no revenue. I actually feel somewhat sorry for them. It's coming home to roost. I'm afraid that the hopes and aspirations of this government are melting away as fast as the snow on Cypress.

I'll leave the government with this simple question. There's that bit in the Bible: "When I was a child, I spake as a child." You know the passage. I just want to ask this childish question of this government. Why after eight years in office, through these prosperous times, are so many of my fellow British Columbians living in poverty? Why are so many of my fellow British Columbians raising their children in poverty? Why are so many of my fellow British Columbians living in the streets? That's the question I want someone to answer from this government.

[1840]

**Hon. M. Coell:** I am honoured to rise in the House today to respond to the Speech from the Throne here on the traditional territory of the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor has provided us with a vision that I believe is both realistic and optimistic. He spoke, as always, with candour about a range of subjects that included the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games, new partnerships that are in progress opening up Canada's Pacific gateway, fostering job creation and open trade and labour mobility, and also creating opportunity and adding support for B.C. families with children in every region of this province.

Initiatives in these areas will help to support B.C.'s recovery from the economic challenges we have been facing and shape the months ahead. British Columbians want a stable government that lives within its means. They want a government that improves and protects vital services. They want a government that lowers costs of the economy and invests in jobs and infrastructure. They are looking for leadership. You can see that this government is taking action. This government is taking a realistic view of the challenges facing British Columbia and offering solutions.

Today I want to talk about some of the things government is doing to ensure that workers and employers continue to prosper, because the future success of our province rests on creating and maintaining jobs in successful businesses and ensuring a balanced and positive labour relations climate. It is how we will recapture and maintain B.C.'s competitive edge as our economy recovers.

There was a time when B.C.'s economy was based on extracting natural resources, largely for consumption and processing elsewhere. In that economy labour and workers were treated very much like a production input. The goal was to get the most work for the least amount of wages. Most working people lacked even the basic protections that we take for granted today. Anyone who looks at the history of labour in this province knows that change only happened because people with vision were ready to make sacrifices.

We now live in a very different world. Today British Columbia has more than two million workers and 200,000 employers. Three-quarters of British Columbians — 1.8 million in 2008 — were employed in service-producing industries. The most valuable commodity this province produces today is its people — people with skills; innovators; people who, like our Olympic athletes, are ready and able to compete on the world stage.

Just as we have a modern workforce, we have a need for modern workplaces. Today British Columbia has better protections in place for working people than we ever have. We have employment standards legislation that is fair and balanced, giving employers and employees the flexibility they need to respond to the changing workplaces, to compete and prosper while ensuring protection and maintenance of workplace standards.

For example, changes to rules around work scheduling in 2002 make it easier for employers and employees to adapt work schedules that best suit their needs. Regulatory changes since 2001 address some of the unique circumstances of specific sectors, including high technology. We have WorkSafe B.C., which is dedicated to continuous improving of workplace safety.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

In 2007 new training and orientation requirements were brought in for new workers and young workers. In February 2008 changes required mandatory prepayment of gas at gas stations throughout B.C., and that will better protect workers in late-night retail premises. Crane safety certification and faller safety certification increased the training requirements for workers in these high-risk sectors.

But all of this is more than just about work. It's ensuring that our most valuable resource, our working people, will be ready for the economic recovery.

As Minister of Labour I recognize the challenges that our labour and business communities are facing. In the

next two decades almost one-third of the people now working will move into retirement, and it is expected that two-thirds of all replacement job openings will require training beyond high school graduation.

[1845]

We're also seeing shifts in skill requirements due to the growth of new industries. Over the past decade growth in the innovation-driven industries has dramatically outpaced the rest of the province's economy. Between 1997 and 2007 the tech sector in B.C. doubled in terms of GDP and revenues. From 1997 to 2007 the number of tech workers in this province grew by 43 percent. And productivity as measured by revenue per person — that also increased by 40 percent.

In 2007 the sector had an estimated 81,000 employees. These high-growth sectors include life sciences, biotechnology, alternative energy and clean technologies, and information and communications technology. Employers in these industries are looking for people with advanced mathematical and scientific degrees as well as specialized skills, bringing new technologies to the market.

But even though the technology sector now employs more people than forestry and mining and fisheries combined, these are not replacing our traditional resource industries. In fact, many of the businesses are developing new products from natural resources, such as biofuels from wood waste and beetle-kill timber. I am pleased that we will support new jobs and private sector investment in wood pellet plants and biomass gasification technologies.

Changes in our economy raise a lot of questions. Where will the new workers come from when our economy needs them? What will they need in terms of work-life balance, and what kind of relationships do they have and want with their workplace and their employers?

Immigration is a rich source of talent for B.C. employers. But even that will not be sufficient to fill the nearly 870,000 job openings expected between now and 2017. Employers will have to look beyond the traditional base to include under-represented groups like First Nations and people with disabilities.

Competition for workers is expected to heat up as our economy recovers. That will certainly drive up wages. It will also mean employers will have to be creative in recruiting workers to put lifestyle ahead of their jobs. But with these challenges will come new opportunities for employers and businesses. It will be an opportunity for B.C. employers to tap into workers with international connections. It will be especially important as we continue to open up trade with the Asia-Pacific.

When B.C. begins to realize the benefits of the Pacific gateway economy, the annual trade gain could be as much as \$76 billion, with an employment impact of 255,000 jobs. It will be an opportunity for First Nations

to build strong local economies, and it will be an opportunity to build truly inclusive workplaces.

The Ministry of Labour continues to monitor these challenges and opportunities and to engage with labour, business and stakeholders in ongoing dialogue about them. My goal is to respond to these proactively to ensure that the policy and labour relations that apply to B.C.'s labour community continue to promote stable relations and reflect the reality of a rapidly changing workforce.

One of my first priorities as Minister of Labour has been to continue an ongoing dialogue with the province's unions, employee associations and employers. Understandably, many that I talk with continue to be apprehensive about the future. None of us can say exactly how long the recovery is going to take, but positive relationships between employers and employees, and employers and unions will be vital as we move forward in the economic recovery.

They are particularly critical as we move into the significant period of public sector bargaining. It is a priority for me to ensure that the Ministry of Labour will be working with others and with unions, employers and employer associations in this round to achieve collective agreements and address the interests of all concerned to preserve our balanced and stable labour relations climate.

The Labour Relations Board will continue to exist as an independent administrative tribunal to help resolve collective bargaining disputes. Just as important, the LRB will continue to help unions and employers build productive and positive workplace relationships through the relationship enhancement program. We will continue to work closely with the LRB to ensure that it has the capacity to perform these critical functions in a timely way.

The employment standards branch will continue to respond to complaints and take proactive steps to ensure compliance with the Employment Standards Act. And through WorkSafe B.C. we will remain committed to ensuring safe and healthy workplaces.

These are some of the priorities I have as Minister of Labour as we work to encourage a healthy and productive climate in the workplace.

Speaking of workplaces, the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games are an opportunity to showcase B.C. workplaces to the world. We are hosting approximately a quarter of a million visitors, and as many as three billion will be watching us on TV. While they watch the athletes compete, they will see the stunning venues that have been constructed by B.C.'s skilled workers.

[1850]

They will see the Richmond Oval, the Whistler Sliding Centre, and the Vancouver Convention Centre, which will house all the international media. At the same time, they will also perhaps learn about the wide variety of job

opportunities and workplace experiences here in B.C. It is our privilege to showcase B.C. to the world as a people- and business-friendly province, the best place on earth to live, work and play.

I started off today noting that candour is paramount. So is optimism. British Columbia has faced difficult times before and persevered. We all want the same things: to prosper and to provide safe, healthy lifestyles for ourselves and our families. For that to happen, British Columbians must come together in partnerships to build a positive labour environment and to help strengthen our economy.

My ministry supports that value through the work we do every day, and my ministry is committed to continuous improvement through regular review of our legal and policy framework. This will ensure that British Columbia and its citizens are positioned as leaders in the workplaces of the future.

Today we can proudly reflect on a continuing legacy of progressive workplace relationships. Great strides have been made from a time when many union activities were

illegal and safety standards virtually nonexistent. If the last hundred years have taught us anything, they have taught us that people of good faith can always find solutions to their differences.

All British Columbians can take direction from this throne speech, and I'm confident that we will all work together to exceed those hopes.

Hon. M. Coell moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

The House adjourned at 6:52 p.m.



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