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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

SECOND SESSION, 39TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2010

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

Orders of the Day

Hon. G. Abbott: I call continuing debate on the Speech from the Throne.

Throne Speech Debate (continued)

C. James: It's an honour to rise for my response to the Speech from the Throne.

I want to begin by acknowledging that this year the throne speech falls on the eve of one of the biggest events in British Columbia: the Vancouver 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games. As we know, for years British Columbia has been building to this moment, and tomorrow night the Olympic torch will enter B.C. Place and light the Olympic cauldron. Every Canadian and every British Columbian that carried that torch en route to Vancouver symbolizes the potential that everyone carries — the opportunity that each individual has to lead, to guide us to a better province and a better country. We must remember to cultivate that strength long after the Olympic cauldron is extinguished.

I want to say to all of our international athletes, media, guests and spectators: welcome to our home. I encourage all of you to take advantage of everything British Columbia has to offer.

To our Canadian athletes: you've been working for years to take part in this celebration. All of us appreciate and celebrate your dedication and your sacrifice. Your country and your province are behind you and are so proud of you.

I also want to offer our special appreciation to all the families of the athletes, because anyone who's known someone who's an athlete knows that it means early mornings at the rink or the ski hill, long days of taking equipment back and forth and huge sacrifice on behalf of the families as well. So on all our behalf, I want to say thank you to the families of our athletes as well.

To our volunteers who, again, have been building up to the next month and who are going to be working incredibly hard: you're the face of our province as we welcome the world. Thank you for your help, your energy and your support.

[1005]

Finally, to all British Columbians, I hope you have the opportunity to make the most of your Olympic experience, whether it's at home cheering on, on the couch

with your family, or going to an Olympic event. I hope that everyone will make sure they provide that kind of support to our athletes.

There's no question that there is a spirit of excitement around the games, but there's also no question that there is a spirit of concern — concern about what's going to happen after the medals are awarded, after the crowds go home and after the final Olympic ceremony.

The public wants to know that hosting such an event doesn't come at the expense of what we all hold dear, that the legacy of the Olympics will build, not take away from, the strength of our province.

I've said many times that you can be an Olympic supporter and still ask the tough questions. New Democrats are going to continue to ask those tough questions after the games are over. There is a growing uneasiness about B.C.'s future after the games, at a time when families and businesses are struggling to recover from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, when education, critical to B.C.'s future and our economic renewal, continues to be under-resourced.

Just yesterday we were reminded once again about how serious the crisis in education has become. We're seeing school closure after school closure, with even more cuts to come. If you're a parent of a child with special needs and they have a year in a classroom without the supports they need to succeed, that individual child doesn't get that year back. Those opportunities don't come back for that child. That's an opportunity lost not simply for that child and that family, but it's an opportunity lost for all British Columbians by not providing the best start and the best chance that that child has to succeed.

We saw yesterday that the government's response really shows how disconnected the B.C. Liberals are from the reality, the day-to-day reality, in our classrooms. At a time in our province when public services that British Columbians depend on, like health care, child care and affordable housing, are under a tremendous pressure, and at a time when nearly one in five children lives in poverty in our province and social inequity continues to grow year after year, the government is focused on the Olympics to the exclusion of nearly everything else.

Let me say that after eight years, we know that's the wrong approach for our economy and the wrong approach for British Columbia as well.

Now, given the timing of this year's throne speech, British Columbians weren't expecting much. But to be honest, I thought the government might prove them wrong. I thought that even with the Olympic focus the government would provide some sort of vision for B.C., one that addressed the social and economic challenges facing families today and one that takes us beyond the end of February 2010. But the throne speech failed to deliver much in the way of substance.

In fact, this throne speech might have an even shorter life than the ones that came before it. In the past, as we

know, in past throne speeches from this government, promises for action were given lip service for even a few months, but the Olympics is going to be gone in a few weeks. Meanwhile British Columbians are left adrift at this most critical moment.

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

New Democrats believe that B.C. needs strong and decisive action today to revitalize our economy, to address social inequality, to fight climate change — action that was shamefully missing in the throne speech.

[1010]

The recession continues to send shockwaves through all sectors of B.C.'s economy. More than 100,000 full-time jobs have been lost. That's an impact on families. That's not simply numbers. That's an impact on families and communities.

Employment insurance recipients have more than doubled. Exports have fallen by more than 25 percent. While we're seeing some tentative signs of recovery, rising consumer debt is a growing concern. There's no question that the economy is the single biggest challenge facing B.C. today. It's the number one issue on the minds of British Columbians.

Yet in the midst of all that, the throne speech failed to address it. Meanwhile, there were ten paragraphs devoted to a weak defence of the HST. That's the B.C. Liberal response: shift the tax burden to those who can least afford it — an economically incompetent and regressive move.

It's pretty clear that this government is scrambling to find anything that they can label as an economic strategy, while we know in British Columbia — and the people of this province know — that the HST is a failed economic strategy for this province.

It's going to hurt consumers, it's going to hurt families, and it's going to hurt small businesses. It won't add a single cent of revenue for things that are so vital for our province, like health care or education. The HST will kill jobs at a time when we've seen, as I said earlier, over 100,000 full-time jobs lost.

New Democrats have been fighting the HST ever since the Liberals announced it last July, and since then we've stood alongside hundreds of British Columbians at rallies across this province. We've collected tens of thousands of signatures. We've presented petition after petition in this House. We even travelled to Ottawa to try and get the MPs to say no to the HST.

This spring we will once again stand strong with British Columbians and fight the HST when it's introduced in this Legislature. We will take every opportunity to oppose the bill when it's introduced, every opportunity to call the B.C. Liberals on their betrayal of trust to the people of British Columbia.

We'll be taking our campaign on the road, directly to the doorstep of every B.C. Liberal MLA. We will be

demanding that those Liberal MLAs stand up for their communities, join with the people of British Columbia, and say no to the HST.

Today B.C. is facing an economic challenge like no other. How do we transform and modernize our economy while enduring a long and protracted period of recovery? No one has all the answers. But what is clear is that we need leadership with the energy, with the creativity and with the drive to ask the right questions, to seek out solutions that focus on the fundamentals we need for a new economy, leadership that makes the necessary investments — smart investments in people, in our economy.

If we're going to emerge from this crisis ready to compete and win, that leadership is needed like never before, leadership that draws on the innovation and strength of British Columbians to get the job done.

[1015]

This crisis is a test of the government's resolve, of their ability to lay out a foundation to guide us through tough times. But this crisis is also a test for the opposition. We also have a role to play during these difficult times. Our job isn't simply to point out the shortcomings of this government. We're also here to respond, to put forward positive ideas and solutions to address the social, environmental and economic challenges facing B.C. today.

New Democrats are doing that work. We're reaching out to British Columbians from all walks of life. We're tapping into the potential of our people. We're engaging economic leaders and innovators, local and First Nation governments, small business owners, labour and community groups. We're putting people at the centre because when we harness that ingenuity, energy and ideas, we'll find those solutions to the most pressing and challenging questions B.C. has ever faced. We're bringing people together to build relationships among British Columbians to maximize opportunities for tomorrow.

I recently held a round table with Chinese business leaders to talk about the approved-designation status for Chinese tourists visiting Canada. They said that B.C.'s not ready to seize that opportunity. We had a great discussion about what's needed to get us there — wonderful expertise shared around that table with good, concrete ideas about how we can take advantage of the opportunities ahead of us, how we can make sure that B.C. is best positioned to be able to take advantage. We're going to continue that dialogue with British Columbians on the new economy.

I'll be embarking this spring to bring together a diverse group from all sectors, all regions and all perspectives to discuss the challenges we face, to talk about how we build the new green economy of the future — a future that is built on the values of fairness and opportunity for all. I'm looking forward to that discussion because it's this kind of dialogue, this kind of engagement, that we need if B.C. is going to move ahead.

New Democrats are offering British Columbians a progressive and practical alternative. We're putting forward solutions to enhance B.C.'s position in the new economy, including support for emerging industries like digital media, to maintain our competitive edge.

We've put education at the centre of our agenda to drive innovation and new economic opportunities, and we've committed to addressing B.C.'s social conditions, starting with our pledge to implement a child poverty reduction plan for the province of British Columbia — overdue, and a strategy that should have been implemented years ago in British Columbia.

We've proposed environmental solutions like a green fund that would take \$150 million in annual carbon tax revenue and direct it to climate change solutions and transit improvements now in British Columbia.

These are just some of the ways that New Democrats are showing British Columbians that there's a better way. Throughout this session we're going to continue to propose alternatives and ideas for our province.

If we're honest about the challenges that we face, if we engage British Columbians so they can be part of the solution, then we're going to weather this storm. We're going to start to build that brighter future, and it is only by working together that we're going to succeed.

I've made a strong, dynamic and sustainable economy the focus of my remarks, but our economic progress can only be measured by what it contributes to the well-being of British Columbians. The word "sustainability" means more than simply being green. It's about recognizing that the decisions we all make must work economically, socially and environmentally. That is what this government doesn't get.

[1020]

The government thinks we should forgo social and environmental concerns for economic ones. We saw that in the throne speech. It braces British Columbians for more cuts, more deregulation, less environmental protection. It sees us miss this opportunity for real climate change solutions. But these are false choices. It's an old way of thinking, and it simply fosters the bitter and divisive polarization that has dominated B.C. and B.C. politics for far too long. By choosing sides, one against another, British Columbia fails.

Today a dynamic economy is impossible without social justice and expanded opportunity for working people, and we can't move forward without consideration of the impact of all of our choices on the environment. It's about balance, it's about trust, and it's about working together to make this province a better place.

New Democrats are up to this challenge because we live in an amazing province. We have tremendous natural advantages — a spectacular environment, abundant natural capital and vibrant, diverse communities. We have everything we need to move through today's economic uncertainty towards a new economic reality.

Having travelled this province, I know that British Columbians are up to the challenge. But if we want to succeed, we have to provide people with the opportunities to succeed — the opportunity for our children to get the best possible start in life, to get a quality education, to be supported as they learn and grow and prepare for their future. We need to provide opportunities for students to get the skills training they need to succeed regardless of their income.

We have to be willing to provide opportunities for hard-working British Columbians who are struggling right now in our province so that they can support their families. We have to provide those opportunities for entrepreneurs and small business people to take their ideas and bring them to market, because we'll all benefit.

We have to provide the opportunities for the vulnerable to have a home, a safe place and the supports that they need, and for our seniors who have given so much to this province, who deserve the dignity and respect in their years, the support and the helping hand.

New Democrats are committed to providing that opportunity to every British Columbian, because together we can build a more confident, secure, compassionate, sustainable British Columbia that benefits everyone in our province.

Hon. M. Stilwell: It's always a pleasure to stand in this House and talk about the future of our people and the province. In fact, that's the underpinning of the throne speech. You see, as much as government — any government — is about dealing with today's challenges and choices, governments must also look ahead to the future and be making plans and decisions that are going to ensure that tomorrow is always better than today.

The throne speech emphasized the tremendous future ahead of us here in British Columbia and the exciting times ahead. We've heard a lot in this House about the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. But if I can be permitted just one mention, I look at the future of this province the way countries and athletes look at the games, and the similarity is obvious.

It all hinges on preparation. If you are prepared to succeed, you will. If you are prepared to tackle the tough challenges, you will overcome them. If you're prepared to do the right things today, you'll be better off tomorrow because of it.

[1025]

The world's best athletes are on our doorstep just hours from beginning competition. Like the organizing committee of the games, they have been at this for years. The Olympic dream here in B.C. is ten years old, and for the past seven years we have been hard at it, planning every detail and leaving nothing to chance.

That same effort needs to be put into the future of our province, and I think the throne speech recognizes that

required effort. I'll leave others to comment in detail about the other throne speech highlights, but I'd like to focus on a few of the elements that are close to me and my ministry and, hopefully, every British Columbian.

Here in B.C. we are nothing without education. Natural ability and natural resources only go so far without a good education. Education is the building block that leverages our talents and resources. Education gives us the capacity to add value to what we already have and creates the kinds of jobs and communities that British Columbians can count on.

The fact is that learning never stops. It is a continuum from preschool and kindergarten through elementary and high school, right on through to our colleges, universities and research centres. They are all connected, and they are all linked. That continuum of learning, that commitment to education over the course of a lifetime is where we will find the building blocks for our future.

Whether it is new legislation enabling universities to remove themselves from the government reporting entity, creating a new master teacher program, developing partnerships with parents to create neighbourhood preschools, offering full-time kindergarten for five-year-olds, development of UBC's new living laboratory initiative or attracting more doctors to B.C. by increasing access to B.C.-based residencies for Canadians who have received their medical training outside Canada, the thread that connects these innovative ideas together is education.

That thread is interwoven into the future of our economy — the types of products and services we will sell to the world, the jobs we will produce and the wages we will earn in the competitive global market.

I agree with the throne speech that this is truly an age of innovation and invention and that a creative economy will shape our future. You can see how advances in technology and science are transforming our world at an incredible pace.

We only have to look as far back as the last time the Olympics were in Canada to see the rapid advance of technology and science. Compact discs were just beginning to appear in the stores, and we were watching movies on a VCR. There was no Internet, and words like "google," "e-mail" and "blog" did not exist. And of course there were no BlackBerrys. How did government function? All of this has happened in just over 20 years.

The advancements in innovation and technology are happening faster and faster, and B.C.'s post-secondary institutions are leading the way. At one of them, the Emily Carr University of Art and Design, we are establishing a new campus near the Centre for Digital Media at the Great Northern Way Campus. This state-of-the-art campus will showcase B.C. wood, natural building materials and the best in environmental design.

The new wood innovation and design centre to be built in Prince George will promote new expertise in

advanced building systems, engineered wood products, interior wood design and applications, and other value-added products.

We are also acting to make British Columbia a destination of choice for international students, who will capitalize on the strengths of our schools, colleges, universities and institutions. Currently our province attracts about one-third of all international students coming to Canada. This is good news, as the B.C. Progress Board estimates that international education has yearly direct economic impact of over \$2 billion.

International students in B.C. contribute to our economy through spending on housing, food, entertainment, transportation and other living expenses. International education is fundamental to B.C.'s future as international students provide cultural, social and economic benefits, contributing knowledge and skills to help us meet labour market needs across the province.

As Minister of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, I know what it takes to create the kinds of jobs we will need in the years ahead and the type of preparation required to secure a strong future for our people and our province. Even during these challenging economic times, I am genuinely pleased that our government has maintained and expanded its commitment to education at every level, as well as our belief that preparing for the future today means enormous provincial dividends for all British Columbians in the years ahead.

As we heard in the throne speech, the world and B.C. are turning the corner in terms of the economy. While there is still plenty to do, including being prudent with hard-earned taxpayer dollars, investment in education — education at every level — is a valuable investment and as important as shovel-ready infrastructure projects.

[1030]

Just as our roads, bridges, hospitals and schools are key pieces of infrastructure, so too are sharp, creative, well-educated minds. Like well-built roads and bridges, a well-built mind will be with us for a lifetime, helping to build a better British Columbia with new ideas and new jobs.

Madam Speaker, like my colleagues, I am excited about our future and the innovation that has been introduced in the throne speech to ensure that B.C. is building on its success and to ensure that we have the brain power and training to compete with the best and brightest anywhere in the world. Like my colleagues, I am keen to get down to work as we go for gold in 2010, not just during the Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games but a gold-medal performance when it comes to educating and training our people and pushing our economy to new heights.

Frankly, Madam Speaker, the Olympic motto *citius, altius, fortius*— faster, higher, stronger — applies as much to us as a province as it does to any of the Canadian and international

athletes about to march into B.C. Place for the opening ceremonies on Friday evening.

That commitment to higher, faster, stronger was reaffirmed in the throne speech, particularly when it comes to creating a powerful and well-educated province that's ready to take on the world. Like our athletes, in 2010 we want British Columbia to deliver a medal performance and podium finish when it comes to the economy and job creation, and it all starts with the best training and the best minds we can produce.

I know that this government has put in place the plans and decisions that are going to ensure that B.C.'s tomorrow is a bright one for our children and our grandchildren. I know that this House is prepared to work hard to deliver a gold performance to the people of this province, and I look forward to the challenge.

D. Donaldson: Thank you, hon. Speaker. I congratulate you for your continuing work in ensuring smooth running of this assembly. I've witnessed firsthand that it can be quite a challenge at times, so I thank you for your efforts.

I also welcome back my fellow MLAs on all sides of the Legislature for this second session of the 39th parliament and for stepping forward to serve the public in this way.

I'd also like to acknowledge my wife, Anne Docherty, and my two adult sons. All three are members of the Wilp Gyologyet Lax Gibuu, the wolf clan. I thank them for their support, their sacrifice and the understanding they have shown while I've been in this role.

As I begin this response to the throne speech, I first want to acknowledge that we are meeting here today on the traditional territories of the Songhees Nation and the Lekwungen people.

The constituency of Stikine is fully encompassed by the territories of six First Nations: Kaska, Tlingit and Tahltan in the northern areas; Gitanyow, Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en further south. It has one of the highest percentage populations of aboriginal people in the province compared with other electoral districts, in a constituency with one of the lowest overall populations and in a constituency that's one of the largest.

Based on those attributes, you would be correct to conclude, hon. Speaker, that we have many remote, rural communities and that the wide-open spaces include an abundant wealth of natural resources on which we depend not just for our health and our economic well-being but culturally, socially and spiritually. We inhabit the landscape knowing we are part of the ecosystems in which we live, not apart from them.

That is a very brief snapshot of the context in which I approached the throne speech, and I will get into more of the social and economic indicators for the Stikine later. But within the context of the northwest, and Stikine in particular, what we heard on Wednesday from this

government regarding a vision that addresses our dire social and economic realities can only be typified as a great disappointment.

I agree with those in the media who follow the throne speeches closely, who called Wednesday's effort leaden and unfocused. I would also like to add "uninspired," at a time when we need — especially the people of Stikine — meaningful leadership in our elected government. I'm afraid that based on this throne speech, this B.C. Liberal government couldn't deliver an inspirational message or wouldn't deliver an inspirational message or is so out of touch with rural community realities that they just don't have any idea how to deliver an inspirational message.

[1035]

When will this government acknowledge that the wealth created in rural parts of the province leads directly to the standard of living enjoyed by those in major urban areas? Acknowledge and make policies. Take action based on that.

Economist David Baxter of the Urban Futures Institute pointed out that 70 percent of new revenue generated in the province comes from rural areas. As I visited the community of Stewart a short time ago, the administrator pointed out that the contribution to the GDP per capita is actually higher in rural areas when you attribute the benefit of the resources extracted from those areas to those living in the area.

All this is to say that those of us living in remote rural areas play a pivotal role in the generally high quality of life enjoyed by many of those in urban centres. We have helped build the cities of this province, hon. Speaker, and now we need some help. But that concept seems lost on this government. Does anybody remember the heartland strategy? It is a long-lost notion, another initiative abandoned by this government, a failed initiative.

This is important, because without healthy, thriving, rural communities, we will never see the full promise of a healthy economy. We make the economy that drives this province, not the other way around. We need policies and programs from this government that reflect that reality, not vacant promises and forgotten strategies.

What is the basis of a healthy rural community? Well, a sound education system is one attribute. But what has this government done? It amended the funding formula in 2002 that resulted in drastic reductions to school budgets, pulled the annual facilities grant without consultation or notice, reduced by 50 percent funding to parent advisory councils. All these have severely impacted rural schools in my area.

In fact, South Hazelton Elementary School is now facing closure. Hon. Speaker, 70 percent of its students are First Nations, and academic achievement is high. That is supposed to be a model that the Minister of Education is striving for. But school district 82 is facing a funding shortfall because of this government's decisions, so the school is on the chopping block. As one parent pointed

out, if you added up all the money this government spent on pet projects in the Lower Mainland like the Sea to Sky Highway and other infrastructure projects, it would fund the entire school district 82 budget for 70 years — 70 years, hon. Speaker.

The parents of South Hazelton Elementary School, and I would say parents of all children in rural public schools in Stikine, would like to know from this government how its choice to support large infrastructure projects rather than properly funding school districts, which leads to school closures, helps this government achieve an unequivocally great education as a goal for all children in B.C. That was the language in the throne speech. Well, simply put, it doesn't.

This government chose its pet infrastructure projects over the educational needs of children in remote rural communities. They made that choice. It's as simple as that. They've gutted the education system in rural areas that is the basis of healthy communities.

Another idea of how we value our people is how the government treats children. We have had the highest child poverty rate in the country for six years running — six years. That is absolutely shameful. I know people that are seriously evaluating how they can continue to live in British Columbia when it has this dismal record.

Now we hear that entities like the Bulkley Valley Child Development Centre in Smithers, a non-profit organization that provides services to children on a contractual basis to the government, are facing funding cuts in this fiscal year. This organization provides many services, such as early intervention with speech and physio evaluation, so that children can get the help they need to be all they can be.

In fact, they were finally able to fill a speech therapist position after a nine-year vacancy. Now they have been told in a letter from the Ministry of Children and Family Development to prepare for cuts to their contracts that will mean a decrease in services. In the throne speech this government says that it cares about children, but scratch the surface, dig a little deeper, and you find evidence and actions to the contrary — actions by this government.

[1040]

What I suggest is that if they cared about children and people in rural areas, they would have discussed a poverty reduction plan in the throne speech. Impoverishment is a terrible thing to experience. Impoverishment is done to people. In a province as rich as British Columbia, impoverishment exists because of policies and inaction by government. In Stikine we have some of the worst socioeconomic conditions in the province. That haunts us in not being able to fully exploit the opportunities that exist in natural resources surrounding us.

Six other provinces have a poverty reduction plan, but there's not one mention of this type of plan in the throne speech. That is shooting ourselves in the foot

and demonstrates a lack of understanding of the fact that people make an economy.

It is for these reasons that people say to me: "This government has lost its moral compass." The throne speech reinforces that. They have lost their moral compass on children. They have lost their moral compass on education. They have lost their moral compass on human capital — the value and validity of people living in rural communities. Priorities have become blurred under this government, and it becomes harder and harder to believe anything they say.

In the throne speech the government says it will fully respect and adhere to First Nations rights to consultation and accommodation. Well, that, where I come from, is a joke. Ask the First Nations in my constituency. I do. I meet regularly with hereditary organizations, band councils and other organizations. They will tell you that this government does not fully respect and adhere to consultation and accommodation imperatives. That will not only be bad for those of us living in Stikine, but it will be bad for all of us living in B.C. — First Nations and non-First Nations alike.

Just two weeks ago I met with the Gitanyow. The proposed northern transmission line will bisect their entire traditional territory along Highway 37. They want to meet with B.C. Hydro and the B.C. Transmission Corporation about that development on their land.

Gitanyow Hereditary Chief Glen Williams says: "Neither B.C. Hydro nor the B.C. environmental assessment office has been willing to discuss our title and rights, stating that this is outside of the scope of their mandates." When they go to the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, they are told that the northern transmission line is outside its scope and that they should go talk to B.C. Hydro and the B.C. Transmission Corporation about topics like impact-and-benefits agreements.

Does that sound like consulting and accommodating in good faith? Does that sound like fully respecting and adhering to First Nations rights? To any fair-minded person, that sounds like the exact opposite behaviour.

The problem is that if we are to reap the benefits from the northern transmission line, then, as I have been saying all along, we need immediate efforts on the issue of First Nations rights and title and the environmental assessment process. But once again it is all talk in the throne speech. If you scratch the surface, you'll find not only inaction but actions that impede progress.

This government gutted the provincial assessment process in 2002. They took out or diminished public consultation components, First Nations consultation, and the act does not allow for consideration of cumulative effects.

Now they talk in the throne speech about streamlining environmental assessment. Well, of course, streamlining unnecessary delays can be a good thing when it makes sense, but this government has established a reputation

of deceit, of not telling the truth, of untrustworthiness. It is no wonder that when they talk about streamlining, people are suspicious.

Environmental assessment processes must have integrity. If they don't, then delays will occur whether it is through the courts or civil disobedience. That is what we're seeing right now. It is a direct result of the policies of this government.

I say: "Get on with genuine consultation and accommodation. Get on with creating an environmental assessment process that has integrity and is properly resourced." That is the way to future prosperity. That is how we will move ahead together and attract investment.

[1045]

No mention in the throne speech of agriculture. The agriculture sector was very important in the Bulkley, Kispiox and Skeena valleys. It is still important, but it could be the sector critical to stabilizing our regional economy, if this government decided it was a priority. Instead, not a mention. Not one mention of the four agriculture recommendations from the Select Standing Committee on Finance.

That was a bipartisan committee, so the majority of members on the government side voted for and even advanced these agriculture recommendations. Still that didn't warrant one mention of agriculture in the throne speech. This is an unacceptable jilt to an important sector in my constituency and across the province. Again, the priorities of this government are out of touch with reality.

The same with fisheries — not one mention — even though the select standing committee on sustainable aquaculture and the Premier's own Pacific Salmon Forum made a series of recommendations that could reinvigorate the fish-related economy in this province. But not one item of recognition of how important this sector is to the people of Stikine and of the province.

"Priorities out of whack with reality." That should be the slogan for this government.

What about forestry? It built this province — just a side mention in the speech. I know, for instance, that the Omineca Beetle Action Coalition, OBAC, has a number of serious recommendations of where strategic investment should occur and how this government could get behind their plan. The mayor of Smithers and others on that committee have said that they don't want all their work of the last several years to go to waste. They don't want to be part of another government report that sits on a shelf collecting dust.

But this throne speech does little to ensure that won't be the case — another failure to listen to the people in the communities and recognize that they can come up with valid solutions to the issues facing us. If only they had a government that would listen.

Oh, the list of what could have been seems endless with this throne speech — tourism, culture, the arts sector. In Stikine, for instance, no mention of how that

sector is supposed to deal with the cuts already made or the HST.

Oh, the HST. According to the throne speech, it is now the most important item in the government's economic strategy. Nothing is more important, in the words in the speech. Well, wouldn't it have been nice if this government had alerted the people of B.C. that the HST was going to be an essential strategy before the May election. Wouldn't that have been novel for this government, being forthright with their HST plans.

No fair-minded person would believe that this government only came up with the idea of implementing one of the most important economic strategies in their arsenal just weeks after the May 12 election. It was deceitful, and such behaviour reinforces cynicism around politics and politicians — cynicism that leads to disengagement and low voter turnout.

On the economic front what I recommend is that this government pay attention to the concept of community economic development and use the throne speech to implement CED principles. Community economic development is not about sticking a smokestack in a community and saying: "There it is." If it's traditional economic development and it happens to be in a community, then it must be community economic development. That is actually what I hear from some development agencies in the north.

No, that model is traditional economic development, and while it is needed, it causes tremendous peaks and valleys that we experience in remote rural communities. CED, on the other hand, can stabilize local economies and help flatten out some of those valleys and reduce the amount of time we spend in those valleys.

Community economic development follows the triple bottom line of analyzing not just the economic benefits of a proposed development but the environmental and social impacts as well. That creates a much deeper analysis and draws a clearer picture of what communities are getting into with development projects so that they can decide on the course of action in the long run.

Those aren't the only differences between CED and traditional economic development. In addition to the triple bottom line, CED is based on inclusiveness. Those who usually aren't involved in making economic development decisions but will be impacted most by the outcome are integrally involved in the process of deciding whether a project will go ahead and often with implementing the project.

[1050]

The final area that characterizes the CED is the question of who benefits the most from this. It is always posed. In the traditional economic model it is usually the faraway decision-makers who have the most to say over a project and faraway shareholders who benefit the most. CED turns that around. The local benefit is most with CED, and the local people benefit the most.

It is a valid, time-tested approach. It has been used in developing housing initiatives in Manitoba, and it is being used to increase the food production sector in my constituency, in Stikine, specifically the Senden sustainable agriculture resource centre and demonstration site.

The balance between large-scale external investment projects and CED is out of whack in rural areas, and it has contributed to destabilizing the regional economies that sustain us. The throne speech contains nothing but more of the same when it comes to economic development of the north, and unfortunately, more of the same is what has got us into this terrible economic predicament in the first place.

Provincial governments like Manitoba's have CED principles embedded into every ministry, and it is part of the reason they have fared better than this province during the economic catastrophe we are still experiencing. My offer to my colleagues on the other side is that I will work with any of them who are interested in innovative approaches that will work to help instil community economic development framework into their government initiatives.

Finally, I noted more than 20 references to the Olympic theme in the throne speech, pretty well one for every page of the speech. The Vancouver Olympics and Paralympics took 12 years to bring to reality. I congratulate the athletic achievement of those from B.C., Canada and around the world who will compete at the games and to the volunteers who are helping pull it off.

These games will be over in just a month, but the throne speech sets out the government agenda for the next year, post-Olympics. The real vision, one that is lacking in the throne speech, the real challenge is: can we devote the same effort that got us to this point with the Olympics to taking action to reduce poverty in B.C.?

Can we say that 12 years from now, impoverished people will be a fraction of what we see now in this great province, that the growing trend of the widening gap between the rich and the poor under this government will no longer be a factor? Twelve years from now, in 2022, can we say we banded together in a monumental effort focused on eliminating poverty?

Sadly, the leadership that such an Olympian effort requires was lacking in the throne speech and has been noticeably absent from this government's policy choices. In the torch ceremony in Hazelton, Alice Maitland, the mayor, shared the stage with Carol Huynh, Hazelton's athlete who won Canada's first gold medal at the Beijing Olympics.

We honoured Alice this year for it being her 40th year of public service, most as mayor. She comes from a family who have lived in the Hazeltons for almost a hundred years. She has lived through many ups and downs of rural life and remains a strong defender of our small communities in this province.

Carol, on the other hand, is from an immigrant family. She benefited from public programs like the School Sports program, cut by this government, to get to where

she is today. She also points out that her athletic determination on its own would not have been enough without the support of her family and our communities. It was a collective effort that put her where she is, based on her individual talent.

But is that collective effort being supported by government action these days, whether it is in education, child development, First Nations or the economy? From what I've described here in my response to the throne speech, I think not.

Carol Huynh ended the evening by saying that what we need now in our communities more than ever is unity and hope. I agree, and when I look at the throne speech for the real leadership in this province on those two fronts, I see a very big void. That saddens me, and it gives me great cause for concern, not just for the people of Stikine but for this province as a whole.

It's not too late. I call on members from the other side to join us in creating a better vision, a vision of unity and hope that we can be proud of.

[1055]

M. Karagianis: Hon. Speaker, I ask leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

M. Karagianis: Today in the chambers we are joined by Ms. Savannah Taylor-Lee and 31 grade 5 students plus a group of chaperone parents from David Cameron Elementary School in my constituency. I had a chance to talk with them just briefly a few minutes ago. I know they're excited to attend the debates here in the House this morning, and I would ask that we make them all feel very welcome.

Debate Continued

P. Pimm: First of all, I'd like to say, hon. Speaker, that I am humbled to be standing here before you in this House for my second throne speech response representing my riding of Peace River North.

I want to again acknowledge my wife Jody; my children, Jennifer, Kristi, Matthew and Shane, for without their support this job would be nearly impossible. I also want to again apologize to them, for they wear each and every statement that I make, and they also get saddled with some of the unpopular decisions that government has to make from time to time for the betterment of the future of our province.

I want to thank my group of supporters that worked with me throughout my election process and continue to work with me to this date. I also want to thank my newly elected riding association that we finally got in place.

I want to thank my constituent assistants, Gayle Clark and Jennifer Wilkinson, who look after the majority of my day-to-day issues and keep our offices functioning properly. They do a great service for our community. I also want to thank my LA, Katy Fairley, who keeps me organized here in Victoria, and Tim Morrison, my communications officer, and all the rest of the staff here in Victoria.

I'd love to mention them all by name, all of my supporters, but I don't want to miss any names, so I'll just say thank you to all. I definitely want to say a great big thank you to all of the B.C. Liberal supporters that elected me to this office.

I think it was appropriate that the Olympics were talked about for the first part of the throne speech. I think that the Olympics will be a great determining factor in the recovery of our great province. On February 12 we'll host the Olympic Games, and the Paralympic Games in March. As the athletes, visitors, media arrive, we welcome them to our province and our home of British Columbia.

This is an incredible opportunity for us to showcase our province and country and an extremely great time for us to promote, entertain and host future and current investment opportunities in our province. I believe that we should have all 85 MLAs hosting and promoting our province for the future of British Columbia, and I for one will not apologize for doing my best to promote and encourage future investment in our province. We'll be hosting over 250,000 people in the province, and we'll be sending our province and message to three billion more watching the Olympics on television.

This Friday the Olympic torch will enter B.C. Place to light the cauldron and officially start the games. The Olympic torch event has been the most successful event in the history of the games. The torch touched over a thousand communities across Canada and another 200 in British Columbia, and 12,000 Canadians had the opportunity to carry the torch and represent our nation and be part of the relay. The torch has inspired the entire country, and we're now ready to support our Canadian athletes as the games begin.

I have personally never seen the kind of enthusiasm that the torch has brought to all of our communities in its travels. I can talk about my riding, where the communities of Hudson Hope, Fort St. John, Taylor and Fort Nelson saw crowds that nobody could have imagined. What I really enjoyed was that there was absolutely no negativity shown towards the Olympics at all.

I must say that when I watched Ross MacLean, who was one of my community's fathers and who has been a father forever and ever, at 93 years of age bring that torch up to the main stage and light the cauldron, I had an extremely hard time keeping tears from flowing.

[1100]

The Olympics is definitely going to help lead us through this thing that we're going through now. Our

community was awarded one of the six Olympic legacy projects, and as a result, we have an Enerplex that contains a covered indoor speed skating oval, two full-sized hockey rinks and a walking track. The indoor oval will be the only one of its kind in British Columbia after the Olympics are done. The provincial government put \$15 million into this legacy project, and the federal government added another \$2½ million, for a total of \$17½ million towards our legacy in the north Peace for our Olympics.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

We must send a great thanks out to the VANOC group that did such a great job of organizing the games and the torch relay. I can assure you that as a result of their hard work, everybody in Canada is extremely ready to start these games.

We must also thank all the communities and their volunteers that put on such great events in their communities. Most of these communities worked tirelessly to develop their programs, and these events will stay with them forever. We must also recognize that for the first time ever, all of the Olympic venues were built one full year in advance of the games and completely on budget.

For the first time ever, four host First Nations will welcome the world and the athletes to the games. I believe there are many firsts, and the first that I'm talking about is the first time that a Canadian will stand on top of the podium in our own country. Go, Canada, go!

I personally have a great tie to these Olympics, as we have two Olympians from my hometown, in my riding. Denny Morrison and Michelle Kelly are both Olympians that we'll be cheering extra hard for as they do their best to achieve their ultimate goal. I believe that the athletes that achieve the opportunity to participate in the Olympics have already reached their goal, regardless of whether they medal or not.

Michelle Kelly is extra special to me, as she is my brother's niece, and I know the family extremely well. I know that I won't be able to fight back tears as she comes rumbling down the mountain on her skeleton sled.

Anyhow, enough about the Olympics. Hopefully, everyone will truly enjoy the games — even those who actively campaigned against the games and have beat us up at every chance. Of course, most of those folks will admit to not being opposed to British Columbia hosting these games and how wrong they really were.

The economy is what drives our province in this great country. Without a strong economy, we don't have jobs. We don't have revenues to support core services such as health care and education. I know we're still going to have some tough decisions to make. They're not going to be all that popular. However, if they're the right decisions to put you in the strongest position to come out of this recession the quickest, then that is what we'll have to do.

The biggest reason that I let my name stand to represent my constituents was that I felt I was the right person with the right background to make the right decisions for the people of Peace River North. I can tell you that after my first session in Victoria, I'm relatively happy with some of the outcomes that I have been able to achieve. I can also say that I'm happy with the direction of this throne speech because I believe it will allow me to continue reaching some of the goals for our area in the future.

I want to be that person who can work with our area councils to bring their issues to the larger picture and to work on their behalf to see their communities thrive and prosper. I am happy to say that I've been able to deliver on some of the issues that our council identified — that our communities will be stronger as a result of the government's direction.

We are very fortunate in Peace River North in the fact that we have a very strong industry in the oil and gas sector. We are very proud of the fact that the industry provides so much to the well-being of this great province. We also have great farming and forestry industries that have continued to hang on through these tough economic times.

We're very proud of the two largest natural gas plays in Canada. Both the Horn River and the Montney developments are going to be very instrumental in the future of our area and the province. These two developments have taken the reserves of natural gas of our great area from less than 15 years to over 100 years for the future of British Columbia. These great plays don't come without some costs, though, and issues that come along with them.

You must have strong communities with good infrastructures to accommodate the growth that is going to come along with the expansion of the industry. I can say that I am a proponent of expanding industry in our area, and this throne speech allows for that.

[1105]

But one of the issues that we still have haunting our area is that we continue to have far too many out-of-province employees in our area while locals are sitting at home. This is the only area in the province where that happens, and I'm definitely going to make it one of my highest priorities to get our locals back to work.

I'm not opposed to out-of-province folks working in our area, but the locals must go to work first. I will be working with the ministry and the industry to achieve as many local employment opportunities as possible while keeping our industry competitive.

I believe that we should be encouraging these out-of-province companies to locate to our area, to use as many locals as possible and to encourage their employees to move to our province and get them on our provincial tax roll.

Our government's economic mission is clear. We must foster job creation with faster approvals, lower costs, open trade encouragement and economic growth

and foster opportunities for families in every region of the province.

I think the recent Supreme Court of Canada ruling on the Red Chris mine project demands immediate attention to rationalize the approvals both within our government and between governments. This government believes that we must work with other provinces and the federal government to establish one process for one project. Multiple government reviews need to be addressed, and duplication must be stopped. Currently we have over \$3 billion worth of projects that have gone through the provincial process but are being held up with other processes.

It's very refreshing to see the province's first wind farm now operational in the south Peace, and I believe that we must continue to move forward with the support of our wind energy projects, as our throne speech indicates. I believe that we must make the necessary moves to provide the ability to get the wind energy to market, and this throne speech allows for that.

Upgrading our transmission system is paramount, and this government is going down the right track by initiating the Highway 37 transmission line, which will spark millions of dollars of investment into an area that dearly needs the opportunities.

Working on a new transmission infrastructure to link northeastern B.C. to our integrated power grid will provide clean power energy for industry and open up new capacity for possible power exports to all the western provinces. Our region has world-class winds, and what that means is that the winds are not so strong as to present a problem for construction, but they are strong enough and consistent enough to sustain a good supply of energy.

In order to bring the investors to our province, they must know that we are going to stand with them so they know that by investing in the industry they're going to have an opportunity to see a return in the future. I think this throne speech says just that.

I believe that we must continue to work with First Nations for the benefit of all. Industry must have certainty, and I think that they'll achieve that with their ongoing work and partnerships that are being developed at the present time. I think that we have already moved forward in a positive way in our area with the development of EBA agreements that are in the process of being developed and some that have already been developed. I believe that as the MLA for north Peace, I must work to help achieve certainty for First Nations and for all communities as well.

The other major issue that my constituents are very concerned about in my region is the Site C hydro project that the province and B.C. Hydro are looking at as part of future energy solutions for the province of British Columbia. This project has been on the books for at least the last 30 years, and I think it's great that there is a process underway to resolve this, one way or the other.

I believe the consultation process is a good one, and I'm happy to see that the throne speech says that we're going to deal with the stage 2 report in the very near future. This will allow many people to deal with the results and the direction of the government and get on with their lives.

I definitely believe that the province of British Columbia should be energy self-sufficient so that we can keep the cost for energy at a reasonable level. I don't think that we should be forced to purchase dirty coal-power energy from Alberta, and the decision to shut the Burrard Thermal plant, except for peak demand situations, is a great move.

I believe that we must look at all alternative clean energy sources, such as wind, run-of-the-river projects, bioenergy and hydroelectric projects. In fact, I believe that the province of British Columbia should be very seriously considering not only being energy self-sufficient, but we should also pursue the possibility of being an energy supplier to the rest of the world if the opportunity presents itself. I think there is a marketplace available to the province of British Columbia that could be every bit as lucrative to the province as the oil and gas industry is.

[1110]

Hon. Speaker, let's talk a little bit about taxes. This government has cut taxes 123 times over the last eight years, and I've heard numerous opposition speakers say that it's a huge mistake. In other words, they would want you to be paying the same taxes as you were back in 2001, when we were at personal levels of taxation 35 percent higher than Alberta. I was seeing companies moving to Alberta on a daily basis because of the small business taxes that were substantially higher than in Alberta as well.

Let's tell you what these 123 tax cuts mean to the average person. On one hand, the opposition says we shouldn't have cut any taxes, but then they tell us that we're ending the world by initiating the HST. I can't quite fathom it all.

Let's just do a little bit of a comparison. In 2001 a person making \$20,000 a year paid \$1,000 in taxes. In 2009 he paid \$177 in B.C. taxes. A person making \$30,000, \$1,848 compared to \$951 in 2009. And \$60,000, \$5,401; \$3,059 in 2009. Then \$80,000, \$8,895 he paid in taxes in 2001; \$4,838 today. A \$150,000 wage earner, \$22,635 in 2001; \$14,000 today.

There are some benefits to the taxes being reduced. They put dollars in your pocket. I think what everybody wants is to put some extra dollars in your pocket, and this government has committed to doing just that.

Talking about B.C. taxes is one thing, but put it into a picture for everything, when you combine provincial income tax, property tax, sales tax, fuel tax, carbon tax, health care premiums and federal income tax. Take that \$80,000 wage earner in 2001. He paid \$25,452, and that

was 35 percent higher than Alberta — 35 percent higher than Alberta. Today he pays \$19,553 in total tax, and that is \$300 lower than Alberta.

Take the senior couple. In 2001 they paid \$5,103. Today they pay \$2,747. Personally, I think that's a pretty great achievement, and I'm very proud of it. I wish that I could take credit for it, but it's my predecessors who get all the credit for that. We'll just leave that one there.

I'd like to talk about HST as well. It seems to be a pretty big question around the country right about now. Why HST? Why now? For the last seven years, eight years, the Finance Committee has been going around the province. Every year HST has been on the books, come back, recommendations for the Finance Committee. Every year, no, it's not the right time. Not now; it's not the right time. The economy is doing all right, yadda, yadda.

This year there were some things that made a difference. I think there were three reasons, actually, that made a difference. Number one was the economy. We needed to do something to help business stay afloat. This was the number one thing that was identified as helping the businesses stay afloat. That's definitely one of the reasons.

[1115]

When you think about Ontario, when they announced that they're going to go with HST, to me it was inevitable that the rest of the western world, western Canada, was going to be not far behind. That had a big fact to do with it.

I think the other thing that we can't forget about was the federal government's commitment to us — a \$1.6 billion commitment. I think that's another good reason. We would be sinful not to have a serious good look at it for that reason.

I know that there are some concerns around the newly announced HST. If I didn't believe, in my own mind, that it was going to be an extremely valuable move to help strengthen our economy, I wouldn't vote for it. That, however, is not the case, and I can honestly say that I don't see all the negative that people are talking about. I know that nearly all of the businesses in British Columbia are coming out in support of HST, with a few exceptions, of course.

Our Finance Minister has worked tirelessly with the businesses and industry groups that were opposed to HST. He's going to continue to work with folks that have come out in opposition — to try to show them the benefits and try to come up with solutions to satisfy their issues.

If you understand the input tax credit system like I do as a small business man, I truly do not know how business could not support this type of tax. Our provincial tax is an antiquated tax, and it was far overdue to be revamped. I believe, in my heart, that this is one of the things that will go a long way to levelling the playing field for my area contractors in the future.

I like to use the analogy of the company that has to buy a new piece of equipment for \$100,000. Today we

pay 5 percent GST, 7 percent PST. The 5 percent GST is recoverable through the input tax credit system, while the 7 percent is not. As of July 1, the entire 12 percent will be recoverable through an input tax credit system, and that will be a savings of \$7,000 on just that one piece of equipment. Just imagine: 7,000 extra dollars just because of what our government is doing for industry and small business.

The main thing that you must remember in all of this is that when industry is strong and competitive and willing to invest in their future, it means that there will be jobs. If we can do anything to help the struggling forest sector and put people back to work, it will be in their best interest, as it will be a whole lot easier to pay a little HST on services when you're working, rather than when you're not.

I haven't heard much talk about the \$230 rebate that each person under the threshold of \$25,000 per year will be automatically rebated to offset their HST costs. That will be \$460 per household for most low-income seniors. It will mean that a low-income single mother with three children will receive \$230 for herself and each one of her children. This will be an additional \$920 to offset her HST costs. These are just a couple of the benefits that will put cash back into the hands of those who need it the most.

In closing, I must say that I'm happy with the direction that this throne speech has taken us. I think that it's laid out what the future looks like. I know that it doesn't sound positive to everybody, but for the majority I think that it is positive relative to the tough times we've been facing and are going to continue to face in the next few months.

Deputy Speaker: Member for West Vancouver–Sea to Sky seeks leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

J. McIntyre: I'd just like to introduce our MP for North Vancouver, Andrew Saxton, who is visiting us here today — no doubt tied with another visit we're having later today, I understand.

Andrew has been doing a wonderful job working with the provincial and federal representatives in doing the infrastructure grants with us. We've been working in a great partnership.

I'm delighted to see you here today. Thank you.
I hope that the House will make him welcome.

Debate Continued

M. Karagianis: I'm privileged once again to be able to stand in this chamber and take my place in this debate.

I would first like to take the opportunity to wish a happy new year to all of my constituents in Esquimalt–Royal Roads and also *gung hay fat choy* as we are on the brink of the Chinese new year.

[1120]

This will be a good year, Madam Speaker, because it's the Year of the Tiger. I know that one of the members talked about this yesterday. I was born in the Year of the Tiger, so I expect this will be a very good year for my constituency, for British Columbia and for me personally.

Here we are on the eve of the great Olympic event we've been waiting almost a decade for in British Columbia. Again, I would like to join with the members all through the House that are extending their welcome to the world as they cast their eyes to British Columbia, to our beautiful province. I know there has already begun to be all kinds of accolades for the beauty of this community of British Columbia, for the cleanliness that they've found in the host city.

I expect that this will be a successful event for our athletes as well. I would like to join the Leader of the Opposition in offering all of our hopes that our athletes will do very well, and I expect that we will bring home some gold medals.

I know it's a great inspiration for athletes across the country and a great opportunity to celebrate amateur sports in our country. So to all of the athletes I say: "Congratulations for your endeavours, the great amount of fortitude and work and dedication that it takes to become an Olympic athlete."

I have several family members in Vancouver who are involved as volunteers. To all the volunteers I say: "Congratulations for your dedication to helping make this event successful and showcasing this fabulous province of ours in the best possible light."

Madam Speaker, I will join with thousands of other British Columbians and watch the Olympic events from my home, from my couch, on my television set. A couple of my very favourite events are the luge and bobsled. Frankly, they are actually better observed at home on the television than they are standing beside the event and watching them flash by in a fraction of a second. Like many British Columbians, my opportunities to participate are somewhat limited, and so I will join the rest of my community in watching from afar.

I think I would be remiss if I didn't reflect the concerns that my community has voiced to me over and over again about the costs of the Olympics — the great cost to us not only economically but the cost socially to the province.

A group of parents with autistic children gathered here just recently for a candlelight vigil on the steps of the Legislature. These parents, for some time now, have been coming to the Legislature and calling upon the government to listen to them in their plea for better funding

for autistic children. Listening to those parents, I absolutely can sympathize.

The same kind of message that I hear over and over again from my constituents is that they feel that the loss of their early intervention program and the cuts that this government has levied against those programs for autistic children are the direct result of the costs of the Olympics.

That is one of the big social costs. These parents have made that very direct relationship between the loss of a program that has been highly effective, which means a world of change for their children, the loss of the opportunity for all the children on the wait-lists for that early intervention program.... I share their concerns about the cost that this event has been to them and to the lives of their children and the future of the lives of their children.

Health care. We have a bunch of surgeries that have been cancelled during the Olympics. I have a neighbour who has been waiting for some time for hip surgery. He is fairly newly retired. He is not an elderly, frail senior, although day by day I watch his health become more and more compromised. He walks every day in the neighbourhood. His surgery has now been delayed three times, and the latest delay is until after the Olympics. His was one of the many thousands of surgeries cancelled across this province.

[1125]

When my constituents say to me that they see the costs of the Olympics are somewhat overshadowing their joy and participation in this tremendous event in the province, I can understand that absolutely, because I can see it every day with my own eyes, with those individuals.

It would seem to me, here in 2010, that we have a brand-new year. We have a brand-new opportunity here, but we are still plagued with some of the same old problems that this province has been grappling with for the last number years — a government that has continued to go after health care, education and social services as a place to gain back their economic problems, self-caused economic problems as well.

It's very interesting that today in the *Vancouver Sun* there's an article that talks about the impacts of these kinds of events on communities. They make very direct relationship to what happened in Montreal. I'd like to read from this article that was titled "B.C. Remains a Strong Investment Destination, Analysts Report."

It says here that "the Premier wants to avoid the mistakes of Montreal, where cost overruns and stadium construction delays forced the city to take on additional debt for the 1976 Summer Olympics. It took Montreal 20 years to pay off the \$1.5 billion debt, prompting locals to refer to the Olympic Stadium as the 'big owe.'"

This is interesting because this article is really about the credit rating of this province. It's interesting how this article has made this direct relationship to the debt

of events of this magnitude against the potential credit rating of the province.

In fact, if we saw Montreal take 20 years to get out of a debt of \$1.5 billion, what are the implications here in British Columbia? We certainly know that the magnitude of the debt is considerably higher than that. I believe that Vaughn Palmer today in his article speculates that it could be as high as \$8 billion.

When I look at my constituency and think about how these individuals in my community view the Olympics, I would have to say that it is with some grave concern. The throne speech that we saw delivered the other day in the Legislature in fact contains many more disturbing messages for British Columbians, and I'll talk about that a little bit more in my remarks.

It seems to me that the anticipation with which people were waiting for this throne speech is an indication of what will happen a couple of weeks from now when this huge provincial event is over, and we have to get on with our lives. What will the province look like in British Columbia for those who have to get on with their lives post-Olympics?

In fact, the throne speech didn't give us a lot of comfort. It didn't give us a lot of indication of what the aftermath of the Olympics will cost us or what kind of vision the government has for beyond the Olympics. In fact, there was no vision in the throne speech. There was a significant amount of innuendo, and there were certainly a lot of recycled slogans and some past broken promises that have been marched out once again. But as far as real and substantial answers to what the economic challenges in the future of British Columbia will be, how we will address those and what the consequences will be — no, there was very little in there.

In fact, there was also very little mention of rural British Columbia. Once again we see in this throne speech a very strong indication that there will be further divide between urban and rural British Columbia. There will be a further divide between those who have and those who have not in British Columbia. We will see an increasing difference between the few who are wealthy and the ever-growing larger class of working poor in British Columbia. That's what I see very clearly in much of the language of the throne speech.

It's very interesting that one of my constituents e-mailed me just after the first wave of dialogue came out after the throne speech the other day, where again we're talking about it as sort of devoid of vision. My constituent e-mailed me and said: "You know, there is a plan in here. It's just being hidden from the public." That's very interesting. That speaks very clearly of what I hear from my constituents, and that's in direct response to the throne speech.

If we go through the throne speech, let's look at some of the things that have been outlined here and whether or not they're realistic and how they fit into the real picture of

what's happening in British Columbia and what's been happening in British Columbia under the B.C. Liberal government for the last eight years.

[1130]

After the pages of sort of hype about the Olympics, we get into perhaps some of the real bones of this speech here. The speech talks about creating new jobs. Well, let's talk about the record job losses that we've had in British Columbia. I don't see any mention, have not heard any real planning or any real vision, around what the government's plan is for the record job losses — in fact, the huge loss in full-time, family-supporting jobs versus the small wave of part-time jobs that continue to feed this issue of working poverty — of those who are earning a living, who are working in the workforce, who are living under the poverty line.

We saw no mention in the throne speech of adjusting the minimum wage. We have a government that would not address the minimum wage when times were very, very good in this province and now refuses to address the minimum wage because times are difficult. Yet this very issue of minimum-wage earners in British Columbia and now the loss of full-time jobs versus the increase in part-time jobs mean that we have families and young people living in poverty, below the poverty line, here in this province.

This budget speech goes on to talk about assistance and support for families with children. In fact, we see an ever-growing dependency on food banks in this province. We have many families that manage to eke out from payday to payday by a reliance on food banks. That's the legacy of eight years of this government, and nothing offered in this throne speech says that post-Olympics we will have any solutions to that.

Child poverty, which we have talked about in this House for years. Again, for the sixth year in a row, we have the greatest level of child poverty, which equates to family poverty, here in British Columbia. For the sixth time the worst in Canada, and yet we have no plan here for how we will reduce poverty in this province. We have a throne speech that talks post-Olympics with absolutely no reference whatsoever to what will happen here, and yet we do have this growing divide. We have this growing concern and issue with poverty and with working people in poverty.

It talks about modernizing our education system, and yet we have a government that has consistently cut education to the bone. We have seen a crisis in rural communities. It is looming now. We have a government that has consistently tried to claim that they have made no cuts, and yet facilities grants are gone and sports programs have been cut.

School boards right across the province are in crisis with growing deficits and a law that prevents them from running deficits, and nothing here is a solution for them other than — and we'll talk about this a little bit later — more privatization and more boutique programs.

We have seen a regurgitation of ideas like the five great goals, and yet those have not even been outlined.

We've seen a government that has learned nothing from the deregulation crisis in the economy in the U.S., which has crippled the economy of the world's leading nations, including Canada's. We have felt the effect of that here in this province, and yet we have in the throne speech outlined more deregulation to come. It seems to me that if it didn't work the first time — the first wave of deregulation put us into an economic and financial crisis — why in the world would the solutions of this government be about more deregulation? It makes no sense to me.

We see a growing indication here that there will be some kind of stripping away, further stripping away, of environmental oversight and protection. We see language here about "time is money" and "duplication is waste." These are alarming sentiments in a day and age where we all know that we have to be more responsible around our environment. We have to be more careful about assessing and caring for our planet, and yet one of the very key messages coming out of this throne speech is that we will see less of that rather than more.

[1135]

We also see — and I think that this, to me, was actually one of the more wry and humorous pieces of this — the government taking a fresh look at regulatory regimes, including B.C. Utilities Commission. It has already been interfered with by this government. This government had tried to run roughshod over the B.C. Utilities Commission and tried to tell it how to do its business. It doesn't like the message that's come out of the commission around hydro and green power, and so we're going to see more tampering with that.

B.C. Ferries and TransLink. These are both organizations that this government very specifically tampered with in a big way — stripped away accountability, put them behind closed doors, quasi-privatization of B.C. Ferries. Now the government is screaming: "Oh, we must get in and take a serious look at this, because there's no accountability." A direct result of your own actions, and now you're going to have to go in and clean up on the decisions that the government made.

We talk about new economic growth and smarter government. Certainly, I think that British Columbians deserve a smarter government than what we've seen for the last eight years. That would be one sentiment in this throne speech that I wholeheartedly agree with.

I do want to lay down some facts here, because the reality is that there have been a number of myths spun in the last eight years in this province by the B.C. Liberal government. The facts of the matter speak contrary to what we've heard from the B.C. Liberals and to the myth that has been built up about their economic prowess and their ability to be the business-centric government.

In fact, we have seen such colossal disaster in how the economy has been handled in this province in good

times and certainly in bad — a government so devoid of ideas and so devoid of vision that they themselves may in fact be stripped of their own title as business-savvy.

The reality here in this province is the full-time jobs lost since the recession began in July of 2008 — 103,400 jobs lost here. Unemployment right now in this province as of January is 8.1 percent. This is from a government that has just rolled out a throne speech that talks in no way about how they will address the reality of that situation in British Columbia.

Let's look at the facts here, and this comes from Stats Canada. This is not anything that I have put together myself. This is bona fide information that has come from Stats Canada. In January, B.C. gained 1,200 jobs. All of the increase was in part-time employment. We lost 4,200 full-time jobs and replaced them with 1,600 part-time jobs. There is not anyone in this House that can stand up and justify how families could ever support themselves on part-time jobs.

In fact, we are going to see more of this increasing reliance on food banks, this increasing pressure of poverty on families — cash-strapped and trying to live from payday to payday. There are currently 200,700 — almost 201,000 — unemployed people in British Columbia. I saw nothing in this throne speech that said the government has a plan for that. The government refuses to even acknowledge that there's a poverty problem in the province, and I'm sure that the growing issue of what these people will do in the future is not on the government's mind.

In the past year there has been a 65 percent increase in two-parent families and a 40 percent increase in single-parent families receiving income assistance — a 65 percent increase in two-parent families. There was a time in the province of British Columbia where if you had two parents at work in family-supporting jobs, you had economic security and stability for families. That is gone. Under eight years of B.C. Liberal government, that is gone, and the government has no vision, no vision whatsoever, for how they are going to address that post-Olympics.

If we look at just the facts of history long term, the B.C. Progress Board says that British Columbia has not done any better economically under the B.C. Liberal government than under the New Democrat government in the '90s — another myth debunked.

In 2008 B.C. was fourth in unemployment, third in personal income, ninth in economic growth, sixth in productivity and fourth in business investment. In 2001, coming out of a New Democrat decade, B.C. was sixth in unemployment, third in personal income, ninth in economic growth, fifth in productivity and fifth in business investment.

[1140]

So the reality is that under eight years of B.C. Liberal government, we have done no better, which goes to show

that they are not the great crafters of a stable economy. In fact, like every other government, they are only able to respond to what's happening in the overall general economy.

Stats Canada shows that under the New Democrats, average annual employment growth was 2.16 percent. Under the B.C. Liberals, average annual employment growth was only 1.76 percent. Now, isn't that interesting? That's Stats Canada, Madam Speaker. When you look at overall economic growth under the New Democrats versus the B.C. Liberals, you see a fraction of a percent of change. In fact, it was higher under the New Democrats than under the B.C. Liberals.

When we talk about the economic security in the future — we talk about a sound economy in British Columbia — let's put it into real terms rather than couching it in a lot of myths, a lot of baffle-gab and empty rhetorical speech, because the facts do not prove out what the government likes to claim.

I'd like to talk a little bit, recognizing that I'm going to probably run out of time before I have an opportunity to talk about all of the economic implications, about what I see as the only solutions that have been offered up in this throne speech and how really damaging and dangerous I think this is for the future.

I know that often this is considered an ideological clash between us and the B.C. Liberals, but I think the reality is that we have seen here that the solution, the one solution, coming out of this throne speech is that the government is going to pursue more aggressive public-private privatization of infrastructure of health care and education.

Again, the real facts of the success or failure of privatization seem to have escaped the government's attention. I think the issue here shows that we have learned nothing by the implications of the current economic meltdown on these privatization schemes. You only have to look at the Olympic village. Taxpayers, at the end of the day, had to pick up the tab of that failed privatization scheme, and that's not the first.

They have failed worldwide. Other countries have moved away from these privatization schemes, and yet we have a government that is now actively embracing this as their solution for the future — so devoid of real, basic economic skills that it is disturbing to British Columbians, and certainly to my constituents who are paying attention, that this is all the government has to offer up. This is their great, brilliant business scheme.

You know, we saw it in the case of the Port Mann bridge. That particular endeavour that the government had relied on and spent years attaching so much importance to fell apart because, of course, the privatization partner melted away. Yet we see that the government is still intent on this.

The Royal Jubilee tower here in Victoria is a really good example of how these privatization projects fail.

We went out to a bid here on the south Island for an extension to the Royal Jubilee Hospital. We needed 655 beds minimum in this region. A privatization contract was struck behind closed doors at the directive of this government, which demanded that at that point anything over \$20 million had to be a public-private partnership.

What happened? We ended up with a tower that only contains 500 beds — 155 beds short of what we needed. Now we are seeing all kinds of implications. There are court cases arising out of this, to say nothing of the fact that the citizens of the south Island were cheated of 155 beds in this process, and the tower is costing more. We are getting worse service, paying more money, and somehow that's considered a good business deal. I'm very disturbed by the implications in the future of what will happen if this government continues to pursue this in health care and education.

[1145]

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I heard once again that the government has dragged out its promise to build the Evergreen line. I think that is very interesting, because that might be the eighth time that's been promised. We'll see whether or not anybody believes that by once again marching out some of these old platitudes, we'll actually see anything done.

They've talked about fixing TransLink. You know, we had great debates in the House about what was happening when that legislation came down. It stripped all the accountability out of TransLink, pushed it behind closed doors, paid astronomical salaries to new friends and insiders that were now running the TransLink board. They've run into a colossal problem because of lack of funding commitment from the government. Now the government is saying: "Well, we have to go in and fix that. We made a terrible mess" — which is, of course, the part of the throne speech that didn't get said out loud — "of this, and now we have to go in and fix it."

The fact that B.C. Rail is now being brought into government.... I mean, do we even have to talk about B.C. Rail? I guess we'll let the court case speak for itself in a few weeks. We've canvassed that issue repeatedly in the House too — about the millions of dollars squandered on an operation that was sold off years ago. So can we bring it inside? Certainly. I think that we should, because then it will be even more difficult to get accountability on that.

I know that other members of this chamber have talked about the HST. In my community this is a hot topic. My community is livid about the HST. I know that as we move into the spring, there are going to be initiatives that British Columbians can join in to try and get the government to listen to reason and listen to the people. And 80 percent of British Columbians oppose

this HST, so it will be very interesting to see as this unfolds. The government is still relying so heavily on this as the great saviour. Privatize everything you can, and the HST, and that will get us through an economic hard time here.

I hear about it every day. I know that this topic will continue to be uppermost in the minds of my constituents as we move through this spring session.

It concerns me greatly that so much of this throne speech talks about issues that my community is deeply, gravely concerned about. They are concerned about the continuing and pervasive dismantling of the health care system, the push for privatization. We've seen how desperate it has been for seniors in privatized homes, where they're now having to pay more money. They're getting fewer services.

That's really the litany of response from privatization schemes — that you always get less service and you pay more. The taxpayer ultimately is always on the hook if these things fail, and we will be again, I'm sure.

It's interesting that the government, in talking about children and families as being so important, has laid out so very little that's of substance to resolve the issues that families are faced with every day. Many of the issues that we will have to deal with in the coming days will be the changes under the Children and Families Ministry. We've already talked about many of the cuts that will hurt communities. Certainly, the things that I see in this throne speech are going to continue to add more duress and pressure on families.

This deferred property tax — there will be lots of dialogue on this in the future, I'm sure. I think this is one of the most ridiculous solutions that government ever could possibly roll out. This will only add more debt to families. This is not a solution. This is, again, another boutique sloganeered program that the government has rolled out because they are fresh out of ideas on how they tackle the real issue of the growing concern of family poverty.

Hon. Speaker, I know there will be a reconciliation in the budget coming up in early March. We will have to reconcile the big hangover of Olympic costs. My community can see over and over again that the implications within this throne speech are that, as always, government will be talking about big business and not looking after children, families and communities.

[1150]

J. Slater: Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the throne speech of the second session of the 39th parliament. After the member opposite's comments, it's amazing that anybody lives in British Columbia. She wants to tax all the banks, I think including the piggy banks.

These past five months have been very busy for me in my riding and in the province. I was very pleased to

have been able to attend two openings of StrongStart centres on behalf of the Minister of Education — one in Osoyoos and one in Grand Forks. New research shows that early childhood development creates brighter prospects for all of our children. These centres are the stepping stones for our children to prepare them for school and to assist young parents, along with the children, in these structured sessions of life skills.

In January, along with the Minister of Education, we were part of a tour of four schools in school district 51 hosted by the school board. The tour gave the opportunity for the minister to see the StrongStart centres, elementary and secondary schools in Grand Forks and the elementary school in Christina Lake.

The school board, in order to meet their budgetary requirements because of lower enrolment, has entered into community partnerships and hosts a family health centre in their school building. This allows the space to be used for family services all in one place.

Two area highways in the Boundary-Similkameen will be receiving upgrades in the combined amount of \$14 million. The Deadman Lake passing lanes will provide over two kilometres of passing lane north of Osoyoos while providing a frontage road to the businesses and residents in that area. The other is a 3A–Yellow Lake shoulder-widening project. Both of these projects are to ensure the safety of all passengers along these routes as well as making it safer for athletes practising for the annual Ironman triathlon.

As I have mentioned before, the Boundary-Similkameen has four ski hills — Phoenix, Mount Baldy, Apex and Big White. All of them have reported their ski season has been great, and they have snow. In November I toured the Big White ski hill with Michael Ballingall and Blair Weston. There has been a tremendous amount of development occurring over the years, especially since the first year it opened back in the '60s when I was one of the original season passholders.

Part of the tour included a visit through their school. Yes, they have their own school. It is part of school district 51, and a presentation on their expansion plans would compare them to Whistler Blackcomb.

I would like to express my thanks to the Minister of Forests and Range. The Boundary area received approval for three more woodlots. According to the Boundary Woodlot Association and after touring one of their woodlots, it is understandable to see the benefits of such an operation. The trees can grow much larger in the ground, and lower limbs are kept clean, which would assist the prevention of forest fires if they occur.

As you may all remember, I and members of my caucus staff participated in Movember last fall, a fundraiser for prostate cancer. Growing moustaches was their awareness campaign, and it did bring awareness, especially when people asked what that was under my nose and how long I was going to keep it. I was proud to be part

of last year's campaign and encourage more men to get involved this coming November.

On behalf of the Minister of Advanced Education, I represented the province in the announcement of the upgrades and reopening of the residences at Selkirk College in Nelson. In partnership with the federal government, Selkirk College and the city, major upgrades to the residences will provide the necessary accommodations for students of Selkirk College.

In the fall of 2009, along with local ranchers, representatives from the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Forests and Range and local residents and I toured the Gilpin grasslands proposed wildlife management area. The tour showed some of the improvements to the area that benefit both the wildlife and the cattle by a local rancher under the job opportunities program.

Through the program they were able to hire displaced forest workers to build water troughs that would allow wildlife and cattle to drink from and to fence around the groundwater sources to protect drinking water and keep animals out.

In the community of Midway there is a mill that used to be the bloodline of the community and surrounding areas until it closed a few years back. I attended a meeting last fall with the current owners, along with the municipality, ministry representatives and past employees, in brainstorming on ideas that would enable the mill to reopen — maybe not in the same capacity. But since that meeting, additional ideas around value-added and export have come forward.

[1155]

Mr. Speaker: Noting the hour, Member.

J. Slater: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to reserve my right to continue debate.

J. Slater moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Tabling Documents

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have the honour to present the Auditor General's report 8, 2009-2010, *Oil and Gas Site Contamination Risks: Improved Oversight Needed*.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

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