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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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MONDAY, MARCH 8, 2010

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Statements

##### EDUCATION

**H. Bains:** I start with a quote from Ted Colley's article that appeared in *Surrey Now* newspaper:

"The foundation of every state is the education of its youth.' Those words are as true today as they were 1,700 years ago when they flowed from the pen of Diogenes Laërtius, a Roman biographer of the great Greek philosophers. There's a general agreement that a well-educated population is one of the cornerstones of a healthy, stable and prosperous society, yet year after year Surrey's school district is left to struggle with inadequate provincial funding."

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

The United Nations declaration of the rights of the child, principle 7, states that the child "is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the elementary stages. He shall be given an education which will promote his general culture and enable him, on the basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, his individual judgment and his sense of moral and social responsibility and to become a useful member of society."

Good learning conditions for children include resources, teachers, librarians, counsellors, other specialists and a broad-based curriculum. While the basic subjects are very important, a well-rounded education includes the arts, physical activities and citizenship development.

In school district 36, with a massive budget shortfall, these basic foundations for learning are being threatened — a school district that just managed through a \$9.5 million deficit last year. Despite additional funding this year, they're expecting a much higher deficit this year.

[1005]

Some say it is an insurmountable task to maintain current education programs. Last year the district was forced to cut six class days, among other things, to balance the budget. They are facing a much bigger challenge this term. Part of the challenge is: where do you cut when the district is growing? How do you lay off teachers when you have 1,100 new students coming into the system?

We have more than 1,200 classrooms that are in excess of the class-size and class-composition limits provided for in our provincial law. These are students already in

the system. School district 36 has received no funding to increase classroom capacity in Surrey since 2005-2006. During the same period it saw 2,700 new students enter into the school district.

As a result, there are 235 portables. As portables are part of the operating budget, their cost comes directly from classroom learning, and it puts further pressure on a budget that is already in deficit. It's not just the school board making these statements. The Surrey Board of Trade is also concerned that the Surrey school district has not been equitably funded. "Our kids are going to schools in portables. That's not right," says executive director Anita Huberman.

Surrey school district is the largest district in the province, and 53 percent of the students come from households that speak a language other than English at home — Punjabi, Chinese, Korean, Hindi, Vietnamese, Filipino.

Surrey school district is the most efficient district in the province, and there's no more room to cut without affecting classroom education. We are saddled with costs that are not our doing, costs that are downloaded without proper funding, such as teachers' salaries negotiated at the provincial level, pension plan increases, carbon action plan, MSP and WCB premiums, H1N1 impact. And now, based on this budget, coming B.C. Hydro rate increases and additional MSP premium increases will put them in a deeper hole.

Early learning years are the key to the future success for our children. Time is running out for children in the school system. There will be no time in future to make up for the lost opportunities. British Columbia's own early learning framework states in part: "The basis for emotional control, mathematics and logical thinking is created during the first three to four years of life."

In other words, for the sake of their lifelong health and well-being, it is vital that children have rich early learning experiences in their homes and communities. With such a massive budget shortfall, those opportunities for early learning will be missed and those children will never recover.

Ignoring the current education needs of our children is equal to gambling with our future. Tomorrow society will reap benefits from resources invested in our children today. Therefore, it is imperative that we provide adequate resources to educators to place them in the best position to educate our children. We must provide our special needs students with the classroom support they need and deserve so that they become productive and useful members of our society.

Investment in early childhood education will play a major role in developing a society with social and economic equity. We have the resources. What we need is the courage, desire and vision to sort out our priorities and invest strategically so that we leave this province in better shape than it was handed to us by our parents.

As a government, our action must match our statements. I leave you with another quote. "Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one." Malcolm Forbes. With that, I'm hoping to get a response with an open mind from the opposition — from the Liberal side of this House.

CommunityLINK is another program where Surrey received much less in proportion — \$58 per student in Surrey compared to upwards of \$219 in other districts. This is a program that helped pay hot lunches, field trips and extra activities for students whose families could not otherwise afford them.

Madam Speaker, we should not play politics. We should not play number games with our children, because that is our future. I expect a lot of numbers are being thrown to confuse parents and teachers and other people who are involved in our school system, to confuse them further. I think this is time.

[1010]

Time is running out for our children. Time is running out to shape our future, because if we miss those opportunities today for our children, those opportunities are missed forever. Therefore, we must provide the resources, resources that are needed now, because as we have said.... Many folks have said before....

**D. Hayer:** Thank you very much for allowing me to respond to the member for Surrey-Newton.

You know, Surrey's education now and always in the past has been a significant focus of our government. I first got elected in 2001, and after I was elected, I met with, at that time, the Surrey school teachers association. The office is on King George Highway, I think close to 90th Avenue or something.

I also met with the school boards, boards of education, and school trustees at that time. When I met with the school teachers association, they told me something. They said: "You know, Mr. Hayer, thank you very much for coming over. You are the first MLA that has actually come in to our office to meet with us. We haven't had somebody there."

I said: "Look, whenever you need any meeting, you call me. I'll be more than happy to sit down and meet with them. My door has always been open."

I have met with many teachers. I have many friends who are teachers and many family members who are teachers. I have my own four kids who went through the public education system — not private education system, public education system. Some of the members might put their kids in different ones. But I do support the private school system as well as the public school system.

What they said to me was.... He said: "You know, Dave, in the mid-1990s the government of that day actually froze the education budget. They never gave us any increases in our pay. They had so many portables all day. It's ridiculous.

"We need to have more funding to make sure we don't have portables expanding. We want to make sure that, actually, we get more money in education. Please don't freeze the funding. Lift the funding freeze, and make sure the funding system for Surrey is more fair."

He said that for the last 15 years the education system, how it was funded, was not fair for Surrey because it was sort of block funding. They said: "What we would really like to see is per-pupil funding, based on the students."

Let me start from the per-pupil funding. Since our government was elected, we have increased the per-pupil funding, and we actually went to the per-pupil, per-student funding. That funding went up by almost \$2,000 per student in that school, which is one of the fastest growing, largest growing. They actually benefit more than anybody else because now it's based on per-student rather than block funding, and that was almost a 35 percent increase.

Also, we started the StrongStart program for B.C., which we have for preschoolers. We have 21 of them in Surrey.

Then my friend just talks about young kids. The best learning time for them is when they're young — three years old, four years old and five years old. Our government is putting up kindergarten classes, the five-year-olds, to full-time. We're actually fully funding them. They're starting this September, and by the next couple of years every school will have them available, so for every child that wants to go there, the parents will have choice. They can put them in there.

Also, teachers' wages. We're fully funding them — fully funding them.

They talk about the HST. Actually, we said that we're going to be rebating the HST to the school districts that qualify. We are reimbursing the school 87 percent of the provincial portion of HST for eligible schools. This means, on average, a school will pay no more HST when HST is implemented on July 1, 2010.

Then they talk about the carbon tax. They always put some misinformation outside, and then sometimes the members of the public who might not have all the facts get confused about that. We are also making sure that carbon tax, the rebate, will not cost anybody any extra for the carbon tax either.

The board of education. We're putting \$110 million in for the maintenance facility, the maintenance grant.

[1015]

Surrey school district. The operating funding has gone up more than a.... It's close to a half-billion dollars. That's the highest of all the 60 schools.

Surrey's operating grant is \$17.8 million higher than last year. Surrey's per-pupil funding is \$2,000 more than 2001. That's a 34 percent increase. The province has invested \$200 million in 39 capital funding and seismic projects in Surrey and school district and will continue to build and renovate schools.

We had built many new schools in Surrey. I remember going through the Panorama Ridge, a school that I used to go to, and Newton junior school — that's a new school. We're putting a lot of funding and will continue to fund them.

Thank you for allowing me time to respond to my colleague from Surrey-Newton.

**H. Bains:** I'm glad that the member who happens to be from Surrey-Tynehead stood up in this House so that people in Surrey — the parents, the school board trustees, teachers and the Surrey Board of Trade — will understand where this government is coming from.

I was hoping that the member would stand up and would have some objectivity in his response. I was hoping that he would not play politics as he often does, going back to the 1990s and what they do now compared to then.

I think the problem we are facing is today. These are the children that are in our school system today. They have very limited time in those schools to learn, to become good, productive, useful members of our society for the years to come, and they continue to ignore that fact.

There are facts, and I was hoping that he would deal with those facts. Since 2005 and 2006 — this is according to the Surrey board of education — not a single penny went to Surrey school board in capital to expand the classroom capacity. In the same period we have 2,700 new students that enter our classes. Hence, there are 235 portables in there now. Portables come out of the operating budget, a budget that is already in deficit.

Not only that, to talk about our children, this is not the best learning environment to be in a portable. In summertime they're hot. There's no air conditioning in them. In wintertime they're wet. They are soggy. There's a huge lineup because there are no additional washrooms attached to them. I have heard a parent who said her daughter had to wait 15 minutes during her break to go use a washroom.

I was hoping that they would stand up and face the facts. I was hoping that in this day and age they will not play politics with our children, our future, as they often do. I was hoping that new day today — Monday — that they will be dealing with some of the issues that are facing our children.

The member said his children were in the school system. He should know then. He should know more than anybody else what are the good learning conditions for a child to have.

As I said before, there are 1,200 classes already that are in excess of numbers of class composition and class-size numbers. That is against the law that was passed here by that government, and those are the students in the system today. Now we're talking about 1,100 new students coming in this year. They will be going into portables again.

## STRENGTH IN INDUSTRY

**H. Bloy:** I rise today to recognize the well-established and accomplished digital media and film industries in my riding and the city of Burnaby. This high-technology sector is quickly becoming one of the most expansive fields that seems to know no limits.

In Burnaby we are the hub for most of the nation's digital media and film companies. For more than 20 years these companies have been attracting international business and building on their reputation as industry leaders. In Burnaby we have thousands of people that live and work in the studio, in the gaming industry. In Burnaby we have three major studios that are leading the way amongst 40 different companies across North America.

Mammoth Studios is the largest sound stage studio in North America, owned by Robert Bosa. We have Bridge Studios that produced *Stargate*, the longest-running one-hour science fiction series in the world. *Stargate* has produced so much of the future in the film industry over the years.

[1020]

We have Canadian Motion Picture Park. They're located in Burnaby and have been doing business in the film industry for more than 20 years. These studios have been creating feature films, television series, commercials, music videos. They cover each element of production from costume and set design to special effects generation. The amount of work that these studios have been involved with is very impressive. We have all seen the film, television program and/or commercial produced by them, whether or not you realize it.

Currently these studios are moving into the realm of interactive gaming and motion capture technology, and we welcome the new business with open arms. Also, new ways of producing film and television, such as 3-D and high definition, are changing the way our studios are conducting business.

At one time the movie was produced, and then a game would follow, and clothing and the soundtrack would follow. Now it could be the game that's produced and a movie follows. It could be a clothing line. They're all intermixed, and they keep working together, so no one knows which way that is going to happen.

Our industry and studios are well positioned now to lead the world in filming. These new opportunities have been taking place for the last eight years and are positioning our local studios ahead of the pack in terms of a diverse range of projects that they can accommodate.

This convergence of the digital entertainment industry is benefiting not only these Burnaby companies but also the rest of the visual effects and video gaming companies in the Lower Mainland. EA Sports and Ubisoft are located in the Lower Mainland and are quickly discovering that there is a wealth of skilled professionals and facilities that they can take advantage of.

This government knows how important these sectors are to the future of our economy. We are committed to supporting them, with the announcement in the 2010 budget that we are committing to further tax credits that reflect the convergence of both the film and digital media sectors. By making it easier for these newer media sectors to do business in our province, we are making certain that they will be able to maintain a strong, evolving and all-encompassing media industry.

We have heard claims that other jurisdictions are trying to attract digital media projects with certain incentives. These incentives are, unfortunately, poorly misdirected and actually unsustainable. The film and media business requires experienced professionals with respected reputations in the industry and people who are looking ahead to the industry's emerging trends.

Our ability to provide a competitive tax and rebate system has helped to draw a lot of business to our local firms. We have established a sustainable and responsible method of assisting this industry that outdoes any other jurisdiction's attempts to attract business.

We are located within the same time zones as California, likely the industry's largest client base. We are, of course, the most beautiful place to live, work and play. We are the best place on earth with our mountains and our mild weather. We have a great destination for anyone. This was only highlighted through the success of the 2010 Olympics and what was broadcast around the world about beautiful British Columbia.

The talent base is larger than any other place in the country. We are also the home of educational facilities like Simon Fraser University and BCIT, and corporate like TELUS. We have the Vancouver College of Art and Design.

Many Hollywood companies have come to know the advantage of producing in the Lower Mainland, not to mention our ability to attract business from the Asia-Pacific regions that are also very much an integral part of the digital media program. We have the strongest system in place for media industries, and the future is promising for them as they look ahead.

Industry leaders are very thankful for the support that the provincial government has shown them over the years. The 2010 Games also provided the digital media industry with many new advantages in terms of attracting new business and clients.

I was fortunate enough to attend, for B.C. Digital, some business conferences where people across North America were here discussing the benefits of setting up business in British Columbia. Peter Leitch, president of North Shore and Mammoth Studios, expressed the value of having the world in our city for two weeks, as many more were exposed to the well-established framework that the Lower Mainland provides.

Because of excellent foresight and strong leadership, our media industry is pleased to be where they are and are extremely optimistic about the future.

[1025]

**S. Herbert:** I'd like to thank the member opposite for discussing this vital industry in B.C. Before I joined this place, I had the opportunity to do some work in this sector, and I have many friends and family who continue to bring our stories to life through this medium.

Of course, the official opposition have always been strong supporters of B.C. film for many years. It was our government back in the '90s who actually created the labour tax credit program, which stimulated all that growth we've seen over these many years. It's a tax credit program that was copied all over the world.

There's no doubt about it; B.C. is a great place to shoot. We're the third-largest centre for film and television production in North America. Locations, facilities and, most importantly, the people — the skilled workers who bring this all to life for us.

But it's been a tough year — a very tough year, my contacts in the industry tell me. They tell me that this year is going to actually be tougher for them, even tougher than it was last year. We saw cuts to the film commission in the last budget in February, and we saw again, in this most recent budget, a 23 percent cut. The film commission works with industry to bring business here.

I think it's important that we look back to last year and what happened. Last July the governments of Ontario and Quebec took strong action to invest in their film and television sectors, and almost instantly, I'm told, the phones in B.C. stopped ringing. International producers who wanted to come shoot in B.C. were now going to Ontario. They could make more money there, and they had a government and an industry there keen for their business.

So where was our government? Well, it said that they wanted to have meetings and that action would come sometime soon. Oh, it would be at the end of the month, and then the end of the month came. Oh, the end of the next month. The end of the next month came. Month after month after month, nothing happened.

I spoke out then. I called for action. I said: "We're losing business here for B.C. We're losing our competitive advantage." But nothing happened. Week after week, we lost more business. Month after month, and it turned into six months and then more. More and more people out of work.

In fact, we lost some of our best success stories to Ontario. Brightlight Pictures, one of the main tenants of Bridge Studios in Burnaby, moved their head office to Ontario — many of the jobs and tax income gone with it.

Months went by and still no action. Industry estimates put it at over \$200 million in business that we had lost.

That sure would have provided many good-paying jobs. That \$200 million sure would have had much good tax revenue for B.C., which could help us out now when the budget is stretched and we're further into debt. Instead, we had no action.

The government finally did act, and when was it? A week after the official opposition, in a last-ditch attempt, joined with the industry and said: "We've got to act now; we're going to lose this industry." A week later the government decided to act, but they didn't do everything that we suggested.

We'd called for an increase in the labour tax credits, for the production services credit and Film Incentive B.C. We'd called for an intellectual property development fund so the companies could own their own material and give them a bigger bargaining chip. We'd called for an increase in the DAVE credit and the tax credit for the video game digital entertainment industry.

The B.C. Liberals acted, but in acting, they betrayed a lack of understanding of how the industry works, and they've actually deeply harmed our B.C.-owned content producers. In acting, they left our British Columbian-owned film companies in worst place than they were before. They supported the production side, which is great, but we've lost the domestic industry. So now many of the domestic producers tell me that they might as well just become foreign service producers — dependent on foreign productions coming to B.C. — and not produce B.C.'s own stories.

In fact, I just heard a sad story of a B.C.-owned company telling a B.C. story about a B.C. hero, which has now decided to shoot the film in another province that will stand in for British Columbia because B.C. is not competitive anymore for domestic producers. That's unfortunate, but it also means that fewer stories of ours will be told.

Companies moving away, companies shutting down and our stories not getting onto our national airways, into our theatres, into our homes. So we will not know each other as well, and our economy will suffer for it as well.

It's bad policy, bad for the economy and bad for the sustainability of our own film industry. We'll have to rely more on the foreign productions — which, of course, are partly at the whim of the American dollar — and not build our own domestic industry. In fact, I believe the numbers are likely to come out in the next few days. I predict, just as we've seen over the last number of years, domestic productions sliding down, losing market share, losing millions of dollars, fewer and fewer domestic products being put into force here in B.C.

[1030]

That's not good for the economy. That's not good for sustainability. That's not good for our industry.

**H. Bloy:** I would like to thank the member for Vancouver–West End for his remarks. I'm going to take

a much more positive stage. He's gone backwards and backwards and backwards, the same as the NDP.

I have to take one exception to his remarks saying that he joined with the industry and one week later our government changed its direction. He's totally wrong on that. If he knew how government and business works, he would know that it wouldn't be done in one week. It was being worked on for years, and all members on our side were there working on the betterment for the film industry.

There's a difference between us and Ontario. We had to look at the whole province. He talks about one sector. We have a deficit of \$2.8 billion. Ontario has a deficit of \$25 billion. So I think that we would have to consider where we would want to go.

The provincial budget for 2010 commits to continued support of our valuable digital media and film industry. We have paved the way not only for these industries but also nearly every industry in our province. Forestry, mining, health care are positioned to maintain meeting current demands and creating room for expansion.

The fact that we have here in our province a number of educational facilities that have offered skilled training delivered by industry professionals with years of experience is further indication that we are much better suited than any other Canadian location for doing business in this sector.

But I want to talk about the pride of the workers. *Night at the Museum* was produced at Mammoth Studios in Burnaby, and I went to the screen opening with a young grade 12 student, Maggie Li, who was a great campaign worker for me. We went to see the opening screening.

It was for the staff. We went to the movie, and it was a great movie. At the end of this movie not one person moved in their seat, because all the staff was there. When the credits started coming up and the different names appeared on the big screen, you'd hear cheers at different sectors throughout the theatre and people yelling: "Way to go, John."

It was just an amazing show of how proud these Canadians are to work in the movie industry. These people live all over British Columbia, and we as a government are there to support them.

#### SUPPORTING CHILDREN IN B.C.

**M. Karagianis:** "The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life — the children; those who are in the twilight of life — the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life — the sick, the needy and the handicapped."

Those words were spoken by Hubert H. Humphrey in his very last speech, and I think that they reflect a similar vein of comments that have been made throughout history around how government treats those in its care, the most vulnerable — as Mr. Humphrey talks about, the children, the elderly, the handicapped.

Investing right now in the future of our children, in fact, is the way we meet that moral test. We know that investments in early childhood will give every child in this province the very best opportunity in the future and will create a future economy that is peopled by workers who are capable of meeting the challenge and of taking us forward with more creativity, with more opportunities to function within the economy to create a thriving economy.

So, in fact, the very best investment we can make as a province, not only morally but also economically and socially, is to put supports in place for children early on that support them throughout the rest of their lives. Every decision we make that is contrary to that kind of investment has a price to pay, and in fact, if we are short-changing families and children along that route, then we have not met the moral test. We have failed.

Currently in the province of British Columbia, we have seen a whole series of disinvestment in families and children. I would like to talk about some of those things a little bit this morning.

[1035]

Service cuts that provided some of the supports for children — whether they be vulnerable or whether they be children functioning highly within the education system — those service cuts, again, fail the moral test that Hubert Humphrey laid out so very clearly.

The B.C. Association of Social Workers has talked about the impacts on children of decisions that have recently been made here by government. Child protection reorganization, cuts to front-line and other positions are leaving far too many children and families at risk and vulnerable. Many do not receive the timely support and interventions they require.

Cuts to community addiction and mental health services, sexual abuse counselling and autism services for children leave many at risk and hurting. Cutting \$10 million of funding to community social service programs that support children and millions of dollars of cuts to gaming and lottery funding that also support community programs all affect children. I would say that if we look at how those support systems, in fact, are being drained away from the province, we again fail the moral test laid out so aptly by Mr. Humphrey.

The issue that has been debated recently in this province around autism funding and funding for special needs children I think shows, very clearly, a wrong-headed decision by government to strip away very effective programs that would support children not only in their early years but would give them that lift that they require to increase their opportunities to live unsupported lives for the rest of their lives. In fact, we saw a program that was very effective axed because of funding constraints self-determined by the government.

We've heard from community living families right across this province that the continuing challenge of

services to special needs children fails the moral test and has disallowed many of those young people from achieving their greatest future opportunities.

As the critic for Children and Families, I know that there are funds being moved from one place to the other or changes in service that are going to, once again, reduce the amount of supports that children in this province appreciate.

The issue of poverty, which has been discussed very often and continues to be an issue of great concern to British Columbians, also depletes the supports for children in this province. We have a growing number of families who are stretched from payday to payday, who are struggling to make ends meet — huge costs for shelter; families who are struggling to the point where they are now seeking food banks in order to get from payday to payday; families who are teetering on the brink of homelessness or who, in fact, are homeless.

Madam Speaker, I would have to ask you: since when did food banks become a norm in the province of British Columbia as a support for children and families? It's a shameful step away from our moral imperative around looking after children and supporting them here in the province.

Education. In the education system, we see a continuation of crowded classrooms. We see a loss of special needs supports that, in fact, have put more pressures onto classrooms for those who don't need the supports as well as those who do, and certainly the teachers trying to work in that environment. We see fewer schools, and we see children being bused further and further to get to school.

Once again, you have to say to yourself: where is this investment in the future of these children if these services are being depleted over and over again? And so I would say that what we have, and what we are creating here in the province of British Columbia, is a generation of loss. We have a generation of children who are growing up in an environment where the loss of services, the issue of encroaching poverty, the reduction in education services continue to deplete their opportunity and their right to be invested in as the future of British Columbia.

I would have to ask, and I'll look forward to the response from the other side: if children, in fact, are our number one priority, and we often pay lip service here in the province to children, what does that mean in reality for those families? How does that look to government?

All of the issues that I have laid out here today mean that we have missed our moral test. We have failed the moral test, because all of the support systems here have taken away the opportunity for British Columbia children to achieve the greatest and best opportunity in the future. I would say that we have failed to invest, and I look forward to hearing the other side's comments on this.

[1040]

**R. Sultan:** I would like to thank the member for Esquimalt–Royal Roads for putting on the agenda this morning what I think we would all agree — and as the member has pointed out — is the vital importance and priority we must attach to the future of our children.

It is said, for example, that we spend perhaps as much as ten times more in government on seniors than on children. Perhaps the ratio should be reversed if society is going to invest in the future. The points she makes are undeniable, except when she starts talking about the track record of this government in addressing these vital needs. She refers to a series of disinvestments in children and families and refers to cuts, cuts and more cuts.

Well, let's look at the track record here. The budget for Children and Family Development has seen a 40 per cent increase since 2001. This government is spending 40 per cent more on children and families than the previous government, the party of the member opposite. Secondly, the budget for children and youth with special needs has more than doubled since 2001 in comparison to the previous government. I can go on.

This government has doubled the number of children and youth with special needs receiving services since 2001. Today it's serving more than 6,000 children and youth diagnosed with ASD, autism spectrum disorder, and their families, compared to only a few hundred under the previous government — 6,000 compared to a few hundred, a rather remarkable increase.

Funding for ASD has increased substantially, in that time period, from the previous government — from \$4 million to more than \$46 million, more than ten-fold. Funding for the assessment of autism, as another example, has increased 34-fold since the regime of the previous government in 2001.

Turning to child welfare services. The number of front-line mental health workers dealing with disturbed families including children has more than doubled since 2001, from 145 to the present level of 378. The number of aboriginal children served by a delegated agency has more than tripled in that same time period.

Looking at child care. It is now more than \$300 million a year, an increase of 42 per cent compared to the previous government — an increase of 42 per cent, compared to the previous government in the area of child care.

Today this government is providing \$65 million a year in operating funding to support more than 90,000 licensed child care spaces — double the number of spaces receiving funding in 2001.

The incidence of children living in low-income families, as defined by Statistics Canada, declined to 13 per cent in 2007, the lowest rate since 1991, in fact.

One more statistic. The province has invested \$43 million to establish StrongStart B.C. centres across B.C. Currently, there are more than 310 StrongStart B.C. centres in operation across the province, offering early

opportunities for families with children pre-kindergarten. How many StrongStart centres were operating under the previous government? A great big zero, my colleague points out.

Many factors contribute to the welfare of our children, and we have no argument with the importance of this. This government has attempted to address the issue with very, very significant increases in expenditure. But of course, it must also be recognized that there are limits to what government alone can do, and we must also look to other policies which would indirectly support stronger families. Day care services certainly must be expanded. The income of those in the lower-income echelons must be improved, particularly in these distressed economic times.

[1045]

All of these factors make up the environment in which children gain their first experiences in life. To repeat what I've already said, to repeat what the member for Esquimalt–Royal Roads pointed out: we cannot put a higher importance on this.

**M. Karagianis:** I appreciate the response from the member for West Vancouver–Capilano. However, I would have to say: let's put some reality back into this discussion.

You know, we have been sanctioned by the United Nations on our treatment of children in this province — sanctioned by the United Nations. You have to say that if from the outside we appear to be failing so miserably in our quest to support children in the province, we have to listen to that. We have to in fact listen to the reality around the true experience for children on the front lines.

In the last decade we have come to rely on food banks as a resource for families and children. Since when is it morally, ethically or socially acceptable that we would rely on that resource? A decade ago we did not rely on food banks to take care of the children in this province. In fact, we have the highest rate of child poverty in this country for the sixth year in a row. Whether the government wants to debate that in some way as a point of semantics is immaterial. We have the highest level of child poverty and have taken no steps to resolve it.

We have services that have been reduced right across the board: mental health services, services for abused children. There is a long list of services that have been cut, and \$10 million more in service cuts are coming in the near future. We have children in crowded classrooms, and we have a system under pressure. We have performed poorly. Any way you look at it, this province has performed poorly in supporting children in the province.

Now, the government can put blinders on, and they can keep those blinders on for as long as they want, but the reality is that we have not invested appropriately and

adequately in our children's future in British Columbia, and we are continuing to erode away any possibility of good investment. We have failed the moral test so adequately laid out in my opening comments.

The government.... If they are not prepared to open their ears and open their minds and think in a different way about how we support children in the province of British Columbia, then I say we have got our priorities wrong. We have got our priorities skewed.

If we continue to ignore these facts, then we are failing the investment and the long-term support of children in British Columbia and will continue to do so, long into the future. With many of these situations now — like crowded classrooms, like the lack of services for special needs, like the loss of autism services, like the growing concern for poverty across this province for families — this is a disinvestment that will have long impacts in families' lives. Anyone growing up in intergenerational poverty has lost the opportunity for a good and healthy future.

#### CHRONIC CARE: IMPACTS AND SOLUTIONS

**N. Letnick:** In a world of aging boomers placing greater pressure on service delivery with their sheer numbers and high expectations, an increasing percentage of the population is suffering from chronic diseases. Health care is already consuming 40 to 45 percent of provincial revenues across the country, crowding out many other important priorities. People and government are going to have to change.

In British Columbia there will be over one million people over the age of 65 by 2023. Chronic conditions such as arthritis, high blood pressure, mood disorders, diabetes, heart disease, cancer and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease top the list.

Approximately 80 percent of MSP, Pharmacare and acute care budgets are being consumed by 34 percent of the population. According to the Health Council of Canada, Canadians with one or more of the seven high-prevalence chronic conditions use 67 percent of all visits to community nurses, 51 percent of all visits to family doctors, 55 percent of all visits to specialists and 72 percent of nights spent in hospitals.

[1050]

With current technology, we cannot eliminate all chronic diseases, but given the serious economic and societal impact of doing nothing, we must make every effort to reduce their frequency and severity.

In addition to genetic factors, there are many other major influences contributing to the epidemic of chronic diseases, including smoking, excessive alcohol, physical inactivity, obesity and poor nutrition. Many are complex issues that will require sustained, long-term societal effort to alleviate. However, prevention is the first step to chronic disease management, with the World Health Organization estimating that 80 percent of some

chronic diseases like heart disease, stroke and diabetes are preventable.

In Canada cardiovascular disease remains the most common cause of morbidity and mortality. However, from 1983 to 2003, B.C. enjoyed a 50 percent reduction in CV disease mortality. This success can be replicated with other chronic diseases, in part by working together to reduce modifiable risk behaviours and accessing effective primary care.

To improve the quality of life for British Columbians and maintain a sustainable publicly funded health care system, our government has made reducing the incidences and severity of chronic diseases a priority. In our publicly funded health care system it is imperative that governments, employers and individuals work together in new and innovative ways to achieve better health outcomes as individuals and as a society.

Many chronic diseases have similar risk factors, such as smoking, excessive alcohol, physical inactivity, poor nutrition and obesity. Helping people reduce these common factors is why the ActNow B.C. program was created and why governments continue to support the B.C. Healthy Living Alliance.

It can take many years for chronic diseases to develop. Most diseases' reduction and prevention strategies benefit from professionals working together across disciplines and organizations that are focused on people-centred strategies. These strategies can include primary care reform; timely feedback systems; training, coaching and monitoring; support networks; investments in active transportation; recreation; school health and wellness initiatives like the B.C. school fruit and vegetable nutritional program; the expansion of smoke-free measures; and improving access to affordable fresh produce in all B.C. communities.

Governments have also come to recognize that there are social determinants of health in the general population and for people with mental illness which need to be addressed if we are to make significant progress on reducing the root cause of many chronic illnesses.

Poverty can lead to the early departure of children from home and high school, propagating the cycle of poverty through poor education, bad food choices and malnutrition, leading to an increase in obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis and certain kinds of cancer. Economic growth at all levels will help reduce chronic illness in our society.

In addition to governments, there is a role to be played by corporations and other organizations. Under the Canada Health Act, medically necessary health care is mostly free to employers, as compared to many other jurisdictions. Ill employees also carry other costs to employers through economic impact, absenteeism and loss of productivity.

In addition, many Canadian employers perceive little incentive to support healthy living practices, as employ-

ees seldom stay with one employer for a lifetime, so there is reduced immediate financial incentive to invest in employees' long-term health.

In contrast, American employers have a direct financial stake in the health of their employees. Shifting health care spending away from treatment and towards prevention is occurring as private insurance companies lower the premiums charged employers based in part on the reduced medical claim costs and generated by their workforce.

For example, at Johnson and Johnson, one of the U.S.A.'s largest companies, HRAs include individual behaviour and psychosocial assessments, and staff is supported through health care habit changes, early disease detection and chronic disease management. Through this program, J&J achieves significant cost savings, at approximately \$224 per employee per year, with most benefits occurring in three to four years after the program's start.

For Canadian employers, the benefits of a physically active and healthy workforce may include decreased employee benefit costs, absenteeism, short- and long-term disability payments, Workers Compensation Board premiums and increased satisfaction and productivity. The government of Canada calculates a return on investment of over \$2 to \$4 per employee per dollar spent.

Therefore, working together with innovative and targeted actions, government, organizations and individuals can help keep our population healthy and our beloved Canadian health care system sustainable.

[1055]

**A. Dix:** I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Kelowna. I won't be distracted by his advocacy of the American health care system in this regard, because as someone who has a chronic disease, I can tell him that it is extraordinarily damaging to do what happens in the United States, which is to make a person's health care dependent on their employer.

As someone with a pre-existing condition, the effect of that is to damage and freeze labour mobility in American society for one thing, because if you have a health care plan and a pre-existing condition, you can't leave the job. You can't be promoted. You can't go on. It is a disastrous system, and the incentives are incentives of desperation, not incentives of quality, and the administrative costs are, I think, by Canadian standards of administrative costs, fantastic.

I absolutely agree. This is a longtime debate, I think, in the health care system. Back to a report in Britain that was tabled in 1920, Lord Dawson of Penn, Consultative Council on Medical and Allied Services, said: "Preventative and curative medicine cannot be separated on any sound principle and in any scheme of medical services must be brought together in close coordination. They must likewise be...brought within the sphere of

the general practitioner whose duties should embrace the work of communal as well as industrial medicine."

We have not, I think, succeeded as much as we could in this regard, either in Britain or in Canada, partly because of the nature of our system, partly because of the weaknesses of the fee-for-service system, which otherwise has some strength and which makes it more difficult to bring those things together.

Let me give you some examples of ways we can do that. I think the member is correct to see hope in the potential of prevention. But one way we can do it is to not take away from individuals the ability to control their own health care.

I'd like to hear the member, in light of what he just said about the importance of prevention in primary care, comment on the fairly savage reductions we saw last week for people with disabilities who want to take care of their own health care and stay out of acute care hospitals, in dental care, in nutritional service supplements — cuts that significantly raise the acuity rate for people with disabilities trying to buy food, which is absolutely necessary.

The taking away of services which the minister responsible for income assistance suggested were excessive in terms of medical devices for people with disabilities so that they can get on with their lives, walk properly, eat properly....

Those services, those decisions made in one ministry will drive health care costs in the Ministry of Health like you wouldn't believe. The government is proceeding with those changes right now, those foolhardy changes to prevention, which don't just take away from primary care but take away from the individual suffering with disabilities, on disability assistance from the government, the ability to control their own health and their own lives.

Surely the member, given his comments, will agree with me that we need to fight those and reverse the cuts that occurred last week, which go in absolutely the wrong direction. The government talks with one voice about individual responsibility and takes away the means of people with disabilities, the ability to control their own health.

Yes, as the member suggests, sick people cost more in the health care system than well people. I think that goes without saying. I can tell him, as someone with a chronic disease, that one of the ways we can assist people is to give them the means to stay healthy in their own right, and that is exactly the opposite course to what we've been seeing. I'll give the member a second example of what I mean.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

In the last few weeks and months in communities like Chase and Logan Lake the government has changed

the model and taken it away — in fact, moved from a salaried model, which allows much more flexibility in the treatment of chronic disease and to deal with issues in small towns, to a fee-for-service model. It's created havoc in Logan Lake.

There was a meeting of 400 people in Logan Lake protesting this decision last week. It affects — negatively, dramatically — primary care. What the government is saying, shockingly to me in this regard.... This is something we can work on. The member is from Kelowna. He has communities around Kelowna that depend on local, primary care services. This is something I think we can work on to change and maybe convince the Minister of Health of how foolhardy this course is.

But what he's doing and the effect of this is to say to everybody in Logan Lake: "Go to Kelowna. Go to Kamloops for your health care." That's what they're saying. It's the wrong course. To move away and towards a fee-for-service model, when all of the suggestions in this regard are that they should stay in the model they have, doesn't make any sense.

I look forward to hearing the member's response.

[1100]

**N. Letnick:** I appreciate the points articulated by the member for Vancouver-Kingsway. It's really important that we attack chronic illnesses with a three-pronged approach. Government, of course, is part of it. Corporations are part of it, and as he says, individuals also have to be part of and participate in reducing the incidences and the level of chronic illnesses.

I'll give you some examples here, because no amount of government policy or corporate incentives can help change an individual if he or she doesn't want to change.

Canadians have a choice. They can attack the principal causes of chronic illnesses by cutting smoking, reducing stress, increasing physical activity, eating healthy fruits and vegetables, or they can wait to develop and accumulate chronic illnesses as they age, which must then be frequently treated with expensive drugs and hospital care.

For example, with only a moderate exercise and diet control program, many overweight people with prediabetes can reduce their likelihood of developing diabetes by a factor greater than 50 percent. Improving our diet, exchanging salt, sugar and fats for more fruits and vegetables, leading an active lifestyle and stopping smoking will prevent 90 percent of type 2 diabetes, 80 percent of coronary heart disease and one-third of cancers globally.

By reducing risk factors, within a decade Canadians can gain another five years of healthy life expectancy. With only one fewer teaspoon of salt per day, the reduction of high blood pressure in Canada would save taxpayers an estimated \$430 million a year. A 1 percent

reduction in blood sugar levels has been linked to less kidney disease, eye damage, a 14 percent lower rate of heart attack and a 21 percent reduction in health-related diabetes, all of which could give us more money to fund the very programs the member is talking about that we should be funding.

However, for many individuals the immediate cost of staying in shape — fitness clubs, equipment, income forfeited during exercise time, forgone comfort food — is higher than doing nothing. Notwithstanding Canadians who are genetically predisposed for chronic illness risk factors or those who are mentally challenged, we are a nation of procrastinators — I, for one, like to procrastinate as much as everyone else — even when it comes to our own health, and frequently fail to mitigate the cumulative impact of our individual decisions.

However, by doing so, we defer the cost of our inaction to our chronic care futures and consequently offload current personal costs over to others through our publicly funded, no-user-fee health care system, and this inaction adversely impacts our own health and the fiscal capacity of governments to deliver a combination of services that maximize the utility of every tax dollar.

In conclusion, I believe to achieve better health outcomes as a nation, there's a role for everyone to play — governments, employers, individuals. The public health care system in Canada is sustainable if we continue taking action collectively to reduce the frequency and severity of chronic diseases, address the difficult challenges of an aging population.

**Hon. I. Chong:** I call private member Motion 5.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 5 without disturbing the priorities of motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

#### Private Members' Motions

##### MOTION 5 — SOCIAL WORKERS AND COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES

**M. Karagianis:** I move:

[Be it resolved that this House recognize the invaluable service that Social Workers provide to our communities and the importance of the community social service sector.]

The community social service sector in this province represents a vast number of providers in every community across this province. I'd like to just highlight a few of those, because I think it's important to show the reach that they have into communities right across British Columbia.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

Some of these organizations are represented by groups like the Adoptive Families Association in Burnaby, the Prince George Association for Community Living, the Association of Neighbourhood Houses, the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations in Maple Ridge, the Boys and Girls Clubs across the province, Burnaby Family Life, the Cariboo Family Enrichment Centre in 100 Mile House, Coastal Mountain Child and Youth Services in Duncan, the Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents in Vancouver, Hazelton Child and Youth Care Services, the Hope Community Services, in Kamloops the Child Development Society, in Kelowna the Family Centre.

[1105]

The Mary Manning Centre here that works with abused children in Victoria, the Nanaimo youth centre, North Peace Community Resources Society, the Okanagan Boys and Girls Club, Parent Support Services of B.C. in Burnaby, the Phoenix Human Services Association, Safe Online Outreach Society, Single Parent Resource Centre in Victoria, the Bridge Society in Kelowna, the Thunderbird Neighbourhood Association in Vancouver and many, many more, hundreds more, that make up the community social service sector.

They are a sector that is in crisis. They say very clearly that they are losing longstanding effective programs and services. Even prior to the current budget we had seen reports of the loss through government underfunding of services right across British Columbia. Hundreds and hundreds of these community organizations are struggling.

These cuts that they have already experienced have caused such things as residential treatment programs for hundreds of youth to be cancelled across British Columbia, community kitchens shut down, reduction in programs for people living with HIV/AIDS, community-based counselling for people with mental health and addictions problems, wraparound programs for people at risk of losing their housing, programs that support people experiencing mental health crisis, and 500-plus employment placements and jobs created every year for people facing mental health and addictions challenges.

Those are an example of some of the services being lost right now across the community social service sector — and more to come because, in fact, in the current budget there will be at least a \$10 million cut to those.

These organizations report that demand is up. I think every one of us who works in communities, all of us who hear in our constituency offices every day about the number of services in demand out there, know that in fact demand is up.

Children and youth experiencing severe mental health crisis are now waiting more than seven months for help. A Vancouver program aimed at preventing family vio-

lence now has a wait-list of more than 80 women. The Lower Mainland food bank has seen a 38 percent rise in demand since last year.

It's very evident that these are difficult times in British Columbia for children, for youth and for families. In fact, this motion is a companion piece to the earlier debate we had this morning about the loss of supports for children. In fact, if we are going to truly value the community social service sector, then we have got to change.

We can no longer permit the kind of underfunding and underpinning of their resources that is currently underway. Not only are these agencies struggling with a loss of funding to try and provide more services for more families, but they are faced with other administrative costs, as well, that this government has brought on their shoulders: harmonized sales tax, which will come in and severely impact these agencies; municipal pension; health benefits trust; additional funding costs across the board for their administrative costs.

For 11 years there have been no funding increases in this sector, and continued cuts are causing a crisis in this sector. That immediately has a ripple effect out to communities. So I would say that we need to stand up and declare our value for these social service agencies. We have to put real resources behind that to make it true and real for people out in communities across British Columbia.

**G. Hogg:** Thank you to the member for Esquimalt-Royal Roads for highlighting the importance of the social service sector and those of social workers.

Having sat on the boards of over 20 non-profit societies providing social services to various communities throughout the Lower Mainland — and I think the long list which the member highlighted.... I think I have visited well over half, probably three-quarters, of the number that she did highlight. It is remarkable that we have 22,000 non-profit societies in our province, and the majority of those are providing services in the social service sector.

The issue of change. I think the issue of change is very important. I think there are three primary models which dominate the organizational landscape of most developed countries, and those are business, government and non-profit.

[1110]

There is throughout the world a burgeoning look at new ways of service delivery and a recognition that there's a fourth sector that's starting to evolve. That fourth sector is a new class of organization with the potential of generating immense economic, social and environmental benefits. This sector can be consciously developed and expanded through broad recognition and engagement.

That sector is often referred to as the social enterprise issues — that happen in that fourth sector — social

enterprise, social innovation. There are a number of people in British Columbia, across Canada and in different parts of the world who are looking at that, in terms of the issues of delivery of services, for how to leverage more and more funds into the social service sector. Fortunately, in British Columbia we have some leaders in that field, leaders who have looked at, understood and are coming forward with ideas that we can address that with.

The motion also makes reference to social workers and the social workers' information and what they provide to communities. Certainly, social work is moving more and more towards community-based models of service delivery rather than structural, hierarchical models, with a recognition that there is an engagement with the people in communities to deliver that.

Some of the challenges that we have, particularly in the issues of child protection and the enormously great work that social workers do in that, are that you can apply the best policies, have the best-trained social workers and provide them with the best resources, and still research tells us that a social worker is going to be right, if they're fortunate, 70 percent of the time.

The ability to predict outcomes is so difficult in this world. Our social workers of this province do a great job with the resources they have, with the policies they employ and the great work that they have. They're moving more and more towards community-based service delivery models where they provide wraparound services to the people in the community.

The other interesting and, I think, tragic part of this is that media coverage is the largest and best predictor of the number of children coming into care. The more and more coverage that media provide on the front pages of various papers, the more children come into care. So how do we actually look at and provide support for...? I think that's what the intent of this motion is. How do we provide that moral, intellectual and structural support for social workers so that they have the confidence to be able to employ the skills and the resources that they have?

Too often this very room becomes the focal point of issues which put social workers on the front pages of newspapers and challenge their decisions in meaningful ways. There are lots of ways being utilized throughout the world to look at providing support and accountability in that process without looking at what happens in terms of the challenges. But it's not just unique to British Columbia that media coverage dictates the number of children that come into care. That is common throughout all of the developed countries.

The issue of the number of aboriginal children in care and how we respond to those, I think, is particularly important, knowing that they are over half of the children in care. We have our aboriginal children, and we're looking at methods of delegating authority and engaging.

We understand and we know that suicide rates on aboriginal reserves go down dramatically when there is an engagement of the governance models — where they have say over and ability to inject and be a part of the decision-making processes that do affect them. We're looking more and more at doing that in this province. In fact, we've demonstrated some leadership with respect to that.

I think it's very important that we continue to support the community social service sector, and I've been working with a number of social service programs and service providers in South Surrey–White Rock. We do and have always done a great deal of fundraising. We continue to do that. We support social workers and the important work that they do.

I think that the future, not just in British Columbia but the future around the developed countries, is moving towards this fourth sector, this emerging model of social innovation and social enterprise, which will give us a new model to look at and to address the needs and challenges that the social service sector has.

Throughout the developed world, as some of the debate this morning has reflected, the burgeoning costs of health care.... And we all know that the social determinants of health are crucial in terms of the impact that that has. So we must place priority on the delivery of services, and social services in particular, to mitigate the impact of the growing demands upon the health care sector.

I certainly support the motion that we recognize the important work that social workers do and provide within our communities and the importance of the community social service sector in providing that, because it is a crucial part of ensuring that we have social justice and improve the quality of life of all people within our province.

[1115]

**Deputy Speaker:** I thank the member and recognize the member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast. [Applause.]

**N. Simons:** I'd like to add my.... Thank you to my colleagues who are so enthusiastically supporting my opportunity to speak to this motion.

It touches close to home, being a former social worker and working with many community social service providers throughout my career with the ministry and with delegated child welfare agencies. I'd just like to say that when we recognize social workers, we recognize their work, and we are not always sure what exactly they do.

But this is an opportunity to recognize them for the sacrifices they make in the course of their duty, as well as to acknowledge the difficult nature of their work. When you talk about social workers and then talk about community social services, you recognize that we're talking about two wings on the same plane. When one isn't adequately functioning, the other is going to suffer.

When you have social workers who wake up in the morning and go to work, they don't know what's going to be in front of them for the day. They might get three or four phone calls from families that are in crisis. They'll have to balance their court appearances. They're going to have to work with families that are already on their caseload and perhaps fill in for a missing social worker in the office next door.

The burden that this places on not just the social worker but on their families is significant, especially when you consider the fact that the tools available for them to do their work are being diminished year by year. There was a time when social workers could go into a home and assess the situation and provide referrals to well-supported community organizations, whether it be for children who witnessed violence or whether it be for a program to support parents with anger management issues or assistance with alcohol and drug issues.

Now when a social worker goes into a home, they hope and pray that either the problem isn't significant enough to open a file, because they haven't got time to do it, or that there's some agency in the community that still has a place in their file for yet another family to work with. For the most part, those social workers go into homes and assess situations and have nothing to offer. They are unable to provide any information or referral to any service that might be of benefit to that family.

So that family is left to continue living in their crisis situation. They might manage it for a few days, and it might not be managed appropriately. At which point the social worker has to come back and make more drastic actions.

When you take away the opportunity for social workers to provide good, preventative programs, what you're really doing is you're burdening the back end of the social services system and forcing social workers to do what they hate to do, and that is to remove children from their guardians. When you take away the options for a social worker, it leads to crises. Unfortunately, when policy dictates that social workers have very few tools available to them without coming up using their biggest tool, which is removal, you've got a system in crisis.

Many people have described the recent changes to the ministry as penny-wise, pound-foolish. I think the cuts that we're seeing to the Ministry for Children and Families — not just in program dollars, but actually in front-line supports — signify to me that it's short-term pain for long-term pain. When you have short-term pain for long-term pain, you've got children in this province who are going to suffer.

If I might remind this House, it was Justice Hughes who told this ministry that they mustn't engage in dramatic change and transformation while they're experiencing budget restrictions, because that was the circumstance that led to the death of a child. That was pointed out very clearly to this government. Yet we see

once again how you see massive change in organizational structure, regionalization, transformation, good practice action guide — all these airy-fairy words and all these changes — being imposed on a ministry while they're experiencing budget cuts.

Well, this ministry was warned by Gove; this ministry was warned by Hughes. Yet we stand in this House having to defend social workers against not the difficult work that they have to do because of the nature of the work but the imposition of restrictions by a government that's supposed to be there to support them.

[1120]

So when I say that I stand with the opposition in supporting social workers and community social service agencies, I do so proudly. I understand the challenges that they face, and we'll be doing our best to support them in practice.

**T. Lake:** I'm happy to rise in the House today to support the motion from the member for Esquimalt–Royal Roads that we recognize the invaluable services social workers provide our communities and the importance of the community social service sector in this Canadian Social Work Month. It's clear from the other speakers this morning that we all value the work of our social workers, whether they be employed by the provincial government or work in agencies around the province.

It should be noted that this government believes in the protection of children from potential abuse by providing front-line social workers with those resources necessary to support children and their families, and that's done in a number of ways. The number of child protection social workers has increased today, compared to levels at the beginning of the decade. It should be noted also that the number of front-line mental health workers has more than doubled, from 145 in 2001 to the present level of 378.

This government has also introduced legislation, in the spring of 2008, to replace the almost-40-year-old Social Workers Act with a new Social Workers Act, bringing it up to date with other modern statutes for professional self-governance. That self-governing college was established in November of 2008.

While the member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast cautions us not to change too dramatically — and I guess that's always a question of debate, how fast change occurs — change is inevitable, and it's important that we look at the way we provide services to children and families. That's why this government has turned to First Nations and returned the governance of children and families back to First Nations, as they have requested.

There are currently 24 delegated agencies across British Columbia and six delegation agreements that have been established since 2001, with seven in development. We've tripled the number of children being cared for by delegated agencies of First Nations from 570 to 1,800.

I was very pleased to attend the tenth anniversary of the Secwepemc Child and Family Services in Kamloops recently and saw the absolutely fantastic work that they are doing. There's no question, as my hon. colleague mentioned, that First Nations children, of which more than half are the children in care in this province, are cared for and their needs delivered by First Nations on and off reserve.

The member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast was mistaken in his assessment of the budget. The Children and Family Development Ministry has increased their budget by about \$9 million and is committed to maintaining critical services to our province's most vulnerable children, youth and families. The ministry budget is \$400 million more than it was in 2001.

There are other ways that we can support families. This budget outlined many different ways that this government is committed to families, including \$26 million more for child care. We know that full child care subsidies for parents earning up to \$38,000 a year serve 50,000 low-income children in this province. That's a saving for a single parent with one child under six years old of about \$550 a month.

Full-day kindergarten beginning to be implemented this year will not only increase the educational abilities of those children but also decrease costs for those parents. We have HST rebates, a rental assistance program that serves 8,200 families and, of course, the lowest income tax for those making under \$118,000 a year in all of Canada.

[1125]

It's clear that our social workers throughout this province do a fantastic job, and my hat goes off to them. I have personal friends in the Kamloops area who are social workers and others that work with social service agencies in our city and region that do a fantastic job, and I am very proud to stand up and support the motion today.

**R. Austin:** It's a privilege to rise and speak in favour of this motion "that this House recognize the invaluable service that Social Workers provide to our communities and" — let's not forget this — "the importance of the... social service sector," as there are many people who do not hold a degree in social work but support our most vulnerable community members in a whole host of ways.

In order to fully realize the importance of this profession and the work that social workers do, we need to look back at British Columbia's recent history to see where we have come from and how the profession has helped our society to move forward or to progress in positive ways.

Social work has its roots in a struggle for society to deal with poverty, inequality and injustice, and so it's linked with the concept of charity work. Prior to

the 19th century we had a very denigrating attitude to those members of society who, for a variety of reasons, were less fortunate than others. Almost all help was on a charity basis, often delivered by various church denominations or reliant on the benevolent notions of wealthy folk who thought it was the right thing to do.

We had this concept of there being the deserving poor and the not-so-deserving poor. Not only was this a very oppressive concept to place upon people in our society who did not have the skills and supports to compete, but at the end of the day, it was extremely condescending and did not recognize that there are forces and policies in our structure of government and society that impose many barriers that make it very difficult for many people in our communities to find success in their lives.

After the enormous change that resulted from industrialization and the movement of people from the rural areas to the cities, there was a recognition that poverty, disease, prostitution and other afflictions were not only demeaning to those whose lives were often not within their control but also posed a threat to the social order of these burgeoning cities.

From this came social activists, who pushed many western governments to recognize that many of these problems could only be solved by pooling our resources in terms of central funding, by creating a profession using modern social sciences as the basis for their practice and replacing all the unprofessional, albeit well-meaning, helpers who had previously done this work.

In Canada the first university to have a faculty of social work was the University of Toronto, which was started in 1914. This was joined by McGill in 1918 and then here in British Columbia at the University of B.C. in 1928.

I think it's fair to say, though, that the greatest social changes came out of the activism of the 1960s in North America, which also affected social policy and government decisions both at the federal as well as the provincial level.

So why is it important to note some of this history? First of all, we need to realize that where we start our lives is in most part a complete accident. By this I don't mean that the majority of British Columbians are not planned but rather that the advantages or inherent disadvantages that they are born into are not of their choosing. Not only are there huge variances in their parents' financial situation, often quite alarming, but there is also the advantage of previous levels of education as well as geographic, cultural and ethnic differences that can have an enormous effect on the long-term life span of all people in our social system.

Simply put, hon. Speaker, we must recognize at the outset that we are not all born equal. From that acceptance we must then look at why it is important to try and ameliorate these inequalities so that everyone has an opportunity to achieve their desired goals and dreams

and to be able to live a comfortable life. It is for this reason that we have chosen to use tax policies to spend on universal social programs, such as health and education, realizing that there is a public good in doing this that goes far beyond the individual benefit.

Social workers, of course, do far more than work in the health care and education field, though, and it is in these other areas that some of the most challenging work is done as they use their skills and knowledge to deal with situations and problems that, frankly, many people don't want to deal with and a surprising number of people don't want to even acknowledge.

Social workers work as case workers, in community development, mediation, child welfare, personal practice and community organizing, just to name a few of their areas of practice, and I think of what our communities would be like if we did not have them doing these important tasks.

[1130]

In this week where we celebrate the role of social workers, it is only fitting that we honour the extreme challenges that most social workers work under and realize that even in the economic hard times — indeed, especially in economic hard times — we must support this profession using public dollars, for this is good for all of us and especially important to those members of society who happen, through no fault of their own, to need a helping hand from someone who has the acquired skills to assist them.

**R. Howard:** It's my pleasure to rise today and speak to the value that social workers provide and to the importance of the community social service sector. It's also with pleasure that I congratulate all social service workers in this province and wish them well in their celebration of social services appreciation week in the province of B.C. They do great work, often under very difficult circumstances, but what marvellous, value-added, high-impact work they do. They're to be thanked.

This issue is dear to me, as I heard during the past electioneering that there were some who felt that this province was deficient in its approach to social services, so I've spent some time looking at the history of this sector in this province. What I found was a decade of success.

First, a fact that cannot go without mention because of the sheer size of the numbers — and it may surprise the average British Columbian — is the continued increased funding of the social services sector. We now have a budget of just over \$1 billion. That is up over \$400 million over 2001. This is roughly over a 60 percent increase over the past nine or ten years.

Even in these tremendously challenging times, our most current budget provides for another \$108 million over three years to support families: all-day kindergarten, services for family and children, youth sports development and community-level arts activities.

I find these numbers are rather robust and demonstrative of a government which is investing significant resources to tackle this challenge of providing for those who cannot provide for themselves. I keep looking to find the concern expressed by some that we had heard.

Just before I get there, I should also mention that Budget 2010, our most recent budget, created in the most difficult of economic times, provides some further measure of relief to support the families who are challenged to make ends meet in these times. Budget 2010 contains provisions for families with children under 18 to defer their property taxes. These are deferral taxes, deferred funds, which can be used for other uses that are important to the family.

Back to the comparative history. The number of front-line mental health workers has more than doubled since 2001. The number of children in care is below 9,000 — the lowest level in more than a decade and 1,300 fewer than in 2001. As has been mentioned, there is a new board of regulation for social services workers. This was created in November 2008. This new act replaced the 40-year-old act that preceded it.

Well, this all seems like positive steps to me. I don't mean to say that all the work is done, because it's not. One child's death, one family's misfortune, is not to be tolerated or taken lightly. We will continue to make improvements in the system, and the system will evolve and improve over time.

But it looks to me like things have improved dramatically over the past ten years. While I've already put forward some very positive results and realities, there is more. Budget 2010 provides an additional \$26 million over three years to support child care programs that assist low- and moderate-income families.

There's even more that is done. On top of the record increases to funding, we appointed a Representative for Children and Youth. B.C.'s first Representative for Children and Youth was appointed in November 2006 by the Legislative Assembly of B.C. The Representative for Children and Youth is an independent office of the Legislature. The mandate of the representative is to improve services and outcomes for children in B.C. through advocacy, accountability and review.

More work done by this government unveiled in the document called *Strong, Safe and Supported* lays out the government's commitment to B.C.'s children and youth. It sets out a five-pillar approach of prevention, early intervention, intervention and support. It has a separate approach for aboriginal and then some quality assurance.

Of course, we must also recognize our government's commitment to families by creating the lowest tax rates for many families. In fact, over 300,000 British Columbians pay no B.C. income tax at all, removing a great burden from them and their families.

[1135]

There is much more, from HST credits to rental subsidies to climate action tax credits. I would like to close with the recognition of our community partners who help us look after our disadvantaged. Richmond has a proud history of community partners in this regard. Just to name a few: the great organization of SUCCESS, the Richmond Chinese Community Society, Touchstone Family Association, Community Living and many more all help our city and our province lead the way when it comes to social services in British Columbia.

**D. Donaldson:** I rise in support of this motion recognizing social workers and those working in the community social service sector. I believe we owe the people in these organizations a debt of gratitude. I'd like to actually just give a bit of context about the reality in which people working for these organizations work in, in northern communities, in rural communities and remote and, oftentimes, aboriginal communities.

The people in these organizations are oftentimes place-based. In other words, they live and work in these same small communities, and that leads to a set of unique circumstances. There's interrelatedness in these communities. Extended families and oftentimes the social worker or those working in these organizations may be related to some of the people that they're dealing with on a case-by-case basis. They might be dealing with their neighbours or their neighbours' children or those people they meet at the hockey rink or at the corner store.

These people are members of these rural communities, and that makes it extremely difficult to have anonymity or to actually have any time off or downtime. I'm not trying to say that the job is more difficult in rural areas. There's just a set of unique and different circumstances that people working for these organizations have to deal with. Oftentimes this can lead to burnout because there is little support from other organizations because of the isolation.

So that's a bit of the context for what we're facing in rural communities, and there are organizations like the High Road Services Society, the Northern Society for Domestic Peace, the Bulkley Valley Child Development Centre in Smithers and the Smithers Community Services Association, the Gitksan Child and Family Services. These are some of the organizations that people are working for that are facing these realities.

They're all working for the community social service sector, and that's part of a non-profit sector and what's called the third sector in the economy. In the economy, we have the private sector that's based on an exchange of equivalence, we have the public sector or the government that's based on a redistribution of wealth, and then we have the third sector or the social economy that's based on reciprocity. These organizations are part of that third sector.

It's not an insignificant sector. It is in fact equal to the other two sectors. In B.C., for instance, non-profits gen-

erate \$11 billion in revenue and employ 147,000 people. This compares to \$16 billion in revenue in B.C.'s manufacturing sector, which employs 167,000 people. So you can see that these are very significant organizations as part of the third sector.

But what has the government done to recognize this sector? Very little. Very little, hon. Speaker. I have a couple of examples. One is a letter here recently received by some of the organizations in my area from the regional northern director of the Ministry of Child and Family Development around contract services. In it, they're looking for efficiencies.

Well, these organizations have no fat. They're run extremely, extremely close to the margin. In fact, I know that in some of these organizations I'd mentioned they're now having discussions about who will forgo their paycheque in order to keep the organization running. Whose turn is it this week to forgo a paycheque? They also deal with the burnout aspect by entering into reflection on their own time with their colleagues outside of paid time. This is the kind of dedication we see.

[1140]

What else has this government done? Well, they've introduced the HST, and it will have further impacts on the services provided by these organizations and social workers. In fact, the Federation of Community Social Services of B.C. says that there are significant negative implications for the entire community social service sector around the HST. So the HST is another hit on these organizations.

In fact, that same organization, the Federation of Community Social Services of B.C., says that the recent budget will result in service and program reductions. Again, that does little to recognize the great impact that this sector has, that social workers have and that community social service organizations have on the whole economy and on people in the economy as well.

Talking about people in the economy, many of these services provided by these organizations are accessed by women and by women with children. Today, on the anniversary of International Women's Day, this budget is a backward step for these kinds of organizations. It's a budget that does little to recognize the role of the community social service sector or social workers. I find that disturbing and disconcerting. I hope that in the future, we will see the recognition that's due these people who work in these organizations and the debt of gratitude that we owe them.

**M. Dalton:** I stand in support of this motion recognizing the invaluable work that our social service workers provide for communities and the people of British Columbia. It's a profession of caring people wanting to help make a difference, and this week is dedicated to recognizing and appreciating the work that social service workers do.

The first real connection that I had with social service workers was about 20 years ago when my wife and I had a foster son, a teenager. We were really impressed by the support that we received from the social service worker who worked with us, and we were able to see this child go to BCIT and gain the support he needed.

You know, there are many challenges that they face. It's difficult when the workers are working with families. They quite often come from very dysfunctional families, and it's a challenge to help them. To see the difference is a longtime scenario. I want to thank the social workers for the dedication and desire they have to help. My daughter talked to my wife about a week ago, saying that she was interested in becoming a social service worker, and I would be fully supportive of that.

This is a government that is committed to supporting our at-risk youth with top-quality staff and programs, and we have put the money where our mouth is. As has been mentioned, we've added \$400 million to the work of Children and Family Development. That's a 40 percent increase. It's very significant.

I know it has been portrayed here by the opposition as a ministry in disarray. I would say that's not the case. We have not only increased funding quite dramatically; we've increased the number of front-line social workers working with mental health by about 160 percent.

This really contrasts with the record of the opposition when they were in power. For example, during the 1990s the number of children in care increased by about 66 percent. Our vision is to work with families to see these children supported in their homes and remain at home. We have seen the decrease of about 16 percent in the number of children that are in care, so that's very positive.

[1145]

As I mentioned, a 66 percent increase under the NDP.... There were 250 of the 300 social workers hired in 1995 who quit within two years due to the work overload. Not a single one of the 53 UBC social work graduates in the year 2000 applied to the ministry for employment, even though there were over 100 job vacancies.

I mean, it's just a little rich to hear about the disarray, the problems that we're having. We are committed. As has been recommended by the Hughes report, we have the representative for children and families. We've developed a Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth that addresses issues and looks at the issues, how we can bring improvement to our work with children.

One of the primary concerns is youth in general, yes. But aboriginal children are highly represented in homes, in care. There are about 4,500 aboriginal children, approximately 50 percent of the children that are in homes. So we have an approach that is dedicated to working with the aboriginal communities. We have approximately 24 aboriginal agencies working with children, trying to support them — aboriginal youth — and we're

making progress here. We're committed to working with aboriginal youth.

So there has been some progress. There's a lot of work to be done. We have programs not only with children that are in care, but we are also interested in prevention. In the school system where I've taught, one of the programs that we developed was Friends. The program of Friends is to deal with anxiety disorders and potential mental problems as kids grow older. We've also implemented the Roots of Empathy where mothers with babies come to the classroom, and it helps with dealing with aggression, the areas of aggression towards young children and bullying.

These are just a few things. There's much to learn, much to do, but we are committing the resources. As I've mentioned, we have put over \$8 million more this year as compared to last year, even though there are fewer children in care, but we want to see our children raised up and all children benefit from a strong provincial economy and support in any way possible.

**B. Simpson:** It's a privilege to stand today to speak on behalf of a sector of our society that pours its heart and soul into individuals who need as much support as they can get.

Part of living in a progressive society is taking care of those who are left behind as our society moves forward. There are a lot of people who don't fit into the free market system, the job creation system, who for whatever reason end up getting left behind. Part of what we are supposed to do in this House as a government is make sure that we provide adequate resources to those individuals. The way we do that is through our social workers and the social service sector, both the ministry staff and the not-for-profit sector.

As I said in my throne speech in here a few days ago, it would be nice if we had podium ceremonies for some of these folks as well.

I was home last week speaking to a group of teachers who deliver the French immersion program. Again, the kind of extra effort that those individuals have to go through to make that program work pales in comparison to what our social workers and our not-for-profit sector need to do to give resources and adequate resources to the people who are being left behind and the people who have the potential to engage in our society but don't necessarily have the resources or the wherewithal to do that.

There is the ministry staff portion of this, and there is the not-for-profit portion of this. As other members have indicated, the not-for-profit organizations are clearly speaking to this government that all of their numbers they're generating — all of this indication that somehow year over year there have been lifts — are not working for them. The federation has sent a clear message to the government that they will be looking at a reduction in programs, a reduction in staffing.

So there's something that doesn't work here. Either the government is mismanaging the resources that they're assigning to this, or they're not understanding how those resources are being apportioned. The federation clearly says that all of the other things going on are undermining their ability to deliver the kind of services they need in the social services realm. HST increases, MSP increases, carbon tax increases, all of the downloaded costs that we've addressed in here on education and post-secondary education, etc., are impacting these sectors as well.

[1150]

I think it's also clear, again.... You know, the members of government like to point to the 1990s. We don't have to go that far back.

This government stopped a lot of the independent oversight for children and youth at risk and for social services. It was through question period and having to come in day after day and embarrass the government around child deaths, around the issue of a whole bunch of files that were discovered that had to be investigated, that the government went to the Hughes report. They did then reinstate the advocate for children and youth — the Representative for Children and Youth.

But now it's crystal-clear, if you go and look at her reports, that she says that the government isn't doing the Hughes report, isn't honouring and valuing the people who are delivering this service by giving them the resources they need. That's crystal-clear.

It's beyond the numbers of reclassifying individuals so that they do or don't appear as needing assistance, and children in care, and all of that stuff. That's a book-keeping reclassification issue. The Representative for Children and Youth is clearly sending a message to this government that the job is not getting done, and it is not blaming the social workers. It's blaming the government for not addressing this issue in a forthright manner.

The other thing that we've got is a misunderstanding today. Again, I would challenge the government members to go back and reflect on what they're saying. The member who stood up and said that somehow property tax deferral is going to help people on income assistance misunderstands how you actually qualify for income assistance.

I have a problem with property tax deferral. It's like paying your Visa off with your MasterCard, and there's a problem with that when you've already got debt loads escalating in households.

But when you're on income assistance, you don't own property. When you're on income assistance, you're not paying taxes, so reducing taxes for the low-income brackets doesn't work.

People on the other side seem to be talking about the working poor, many of whom do get access to social services. But when you're on income assistance, those kinds of government assistance don't work. In fact, when you get subsidies back from the government on HST or carbon tax, etc., you have to go in and do a negotiation with

your caseworker to make sure that doesn't get deducted against what you're going to get that month.

We're talking here about people who need to address the public service. They need to get help from our social workers. They need to get help from the not-for-profit sector working in the social services domain. Quite frankly, what's happening is that those individuals are feeling, and they're speaking out, that they are under-resourced. They continue to be under-resourced.

The final comment I'll make.... The members on the other side, as well as our side, have pointed out the issue of First Nations and how over 50 percent of children at risk involved with social services are First Nations. That's an issue that we all agree must be addressed. It's the largest-growing population, and it requires some kind of strategy to address that.

In closing, I just want to recognize that beyond the politics of the 1990s and the politics of numbers today, there are a group of people in our society, in the ministry and in the social services not-for-profit sector, who deliver value for dollar. We need to start giving them a gold medal for what they do, and the best gold medal that they would like is better resourcing, more direct resourcing and more support for the difficult task they have to do every day.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

**N. Letnick:** Danelle Johnson, a social worker, shares part of her story in Craig LeCroy's book *The Call to Social Work*. She says:

"I have seen a lot of people die of alcoholism. I went to a funeral last Saturday for a person who came through our detox program. She struggled with recovery, relapsed and was murdered. She was 31 years of age. She left three children. It's sad. But I've seen successes too. One of the patients at the hospital was in a coma from alcohol-related complications."

He probably had end-stage liver disease.

"I don't remember his diagnosis, but he was dying from alcoholism as well. We were going to do an involuntary commitment to get him into a treatment centre, and the doctor said: 'Don't bother. He's probably not going to make it through the night.'"

[1155]

"His family prayed and did some ceremonies for him, and the next day he became conscious. The judge came over to the hospital room to do the involuntary commitment and sent him off to a halfway house for nine months. He sobered up and started working at some tribal jobs. Over the years, he progressed up the career ladder, and one day...I saw him shopping for a suit. I said: 'What are you doing...?' He said: 'I was elected to the council. I've come a long way in seven years.' Then he shook my hand."

Clearly, social work is a profession for those with a strong desire to help improve people's lives, assisting people by helping them cope with issues in everyday lives, deal with their relationships and solve personal and family problems.

Some social workers help clients who face disability or life-threatening disease or a social problem such as inadequate housing, unemployment or substance abuse. Social workers also assist families that have serious do-

mestic conflicts, sometimes involving child or spousal abuse. Some social workers conduct research, advocate for improved services, engage in system design or are involved in planning or policy development.

Employment is projected to grow faster than the average for all occupations, particularly for social workers who specialize with the aging population.

With that, let us continue to make the best decisions in this chamber that will lead to investment, economic prosperity and jobs which, hopefully, will reduce the burden on our social workers and generate the revenues necessary to support them as they work diligently throughout B.C. in bringing meaning and purpose to the lives of many British Columbians, including those who we almost pass up for dead.

N. Letnick moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

**Hon. I. Chong:** I thank all the members for all their contributions in this morning's debate.

Hon. I. Chong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:57 a.m.



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