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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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## CONTENTS

Monday, May 31, 2010  
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Page

### Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements .....	5941
Consultation with the public	
N. Simons	
J. Slater	
Working together towards a stronger economy	
D. Horne	
D. Black	
Ferries	
G. Coons	
R. Howard	
Strong walls for solid futures	
N. Letnick	
M. Karagianis	
Private Members' Motions .....	5950
Motion 14 — Sustainable wild salmon stock and aquaculture	
L. Popham	
D. Hayer	
R. Fleming	
D. Barnett	
M. Sather	
J. van Dongen	
B. Routley	
R. Cantelon	
B. Simpson	



MONDAY, MAY 31, 2010

The House met at 10:04 a.m.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

Prayers.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Statements

##### CONSULTATION WITH THE PUBLIC

**N. Simons:** Madam Speaker, good day to you, to the members opposite and to my colleagues in the House. It's my opportunity now to speak about an issue that I think is of great importance to the people of this province, and that is the issue of public consultation.

[1005]

Ever since being elected back in 2005, I think that public consultation, the issue around public consultation, has permeated all of the concerns brought to my attention by the members of the public, whether it be consultation on the development of a new industrial project — whether that be mining or forestry or independent power — or consultation about local and regional issues as well.

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

What I think is democracies have to be robust. They have to be robust in terms of representing the interests of the public. The public has an opportunity every four years or thereabouts to elect representatives who will reflect their views in this chamber, who will debate legislation from a perspective that their constituents expect and who will have some influence in designing regulations and standards that will meet the interests of the public, of our environment and of, essentially, our political structure.

What I find troubling is the tendency we see now of reducing the public's involvement in designing public policy that impacts them. In my constituency of Powell River–Sunshine Coast alone I have two examples of how the public consultation process has failed. The two examples, unfortunately, I'm going to use are around private run-of-river power.

The first failure of consultation is well-known to the people of Powell River. They were proposed a project that would bring jobs and economic stimulus to the community. Their promises were many around the protection of the environment with the guaranteeing of jobs and opportunities and to ensure that people would still have access to the Crown land which is owned by us, the people of the province.

Now, it surprised many people in Powell River when they found out that the roads that they had used for generations to access beautiful wilderness places in the Powell River region would no longer be accessible. Recreational access would be reduced. However, during the public consultation process, such as it is under the Environmental Assessment Act, they were promised specifically that their access to the roads, to the Crown land, would be the same or better.

They woke up in December to find out that that wasn't true, that Plutonic was going to be engaged in road deactivation, bringing the standard of roads to such a state that they would be impassable to hikers, bikers, ATVers, four-wheel-drivers and others who wish to go to places that they've been going for generations.

Now, to illustrate public consultation, perhaps the irony of it, this is on Plutonic Power's website: "Plutonic Power is committed to continuing to meet and work with road permit holders and recreational groups related to access and will continue to share details of road deactivation plans once they are finalized."

Now, it's the "once they are finalized" part that stabs to the heart of this public consultation. Consultation can't happen after plans are finalized. My concern is extended now to the federal government, which is proposing further reductions of the environmental assessment process. Bill C-9 gives the minister the power to determine what is a reviewable project and what isn't. It has the power to exempt some projects from environmental review, and this, unfortunately, is a decision made in secrecy by cabinet ministers.

[1010]

My concern is that when the public loses its voice, it loses its respect for the democratic institutions, and unfortunately, the result is cynicism, detachment from the political process and the common view that we don't really do much here. This may serve some people's interests. It certainly doesn't serve the interests of the public. The public needs to feel.... It needs to have a role in the development of public policy so that it will actually have a real impact, influence, on the decisions that government makes.

The government is supposed to reflect the interests of the people, and if they stop listening to the people after the election is over, that is a failure of that democratic system.

I'm not saying that any other system is better than democracy, but we need to use the democracy we have, and we need to take full advantage of that by encouraging the public to be involved, by encouraging the public to take full advantage of all the opportunities that are placed before them, to speak on issues that are of concern to them, whether it be access to Crown land, protection of salmon, access to facilities, even the promotion of certain activities in one's community.

If public consultation is not robust and is not encouraged, then unfortunately, we have a system that is failing.

**J. Slater:** I find it really interesting how members of the opposite side can say that we don't consult with people. Right now we're working on the Water Act modernization. It's a great process that we're going through right now. We've had 12 sessions, workshops throughout the province, and 600 participants have been going to these workshops. Three of them were First Nations-specific. The blog that we have for the WAM project has had 900 submissions, and these come from all the stakeholders all over the province.

We also are working on — and the member from Kamloops certainly knows about this — the Ranching Task Force, where we go around the province and talk to a lot of people, a lot of stakeholders. These types of things are going on throughout the province.

We also have this task force of a joint group of elected officials representing UBCM and the provincial government. The task force has received thousands of submissions from local governments, organizations and from individuals. Local governments of all sizes right from Midway to Dawson Creek have submitted their views for the deliberation of the task force.

Organizations that have made submissions include unions, businesses, political parties — including the official opposition — and a number of other groups. The task force for considering specific issues relating to campaign financing, disclosure and limits on tax credits, enforcement processes and outcomes, the role of the chief electoral officer in British Columbia, election cycle — whether it should be three years or four years — the corporate vote and other agreed matters that they will be looking at....

The oil and gas industry has invested almost \$30 billion in British Columbia since 2001, creating 34,000 direct and indirect jobs. Since 2001 we have provided \$2.7 billion in additional funding to support local governments, over 60 percent of which has gone into rural communities. Almost half of this supported the local government capital and infrastructure programs, while the remainder supports local government operations.

Since 2008 \$5.3 billion has been committed to 850 accelerated capital projects in communities across B.C., creating approximately 34,000 construction jobs, and the budget in 2010 lays out \$20.7 billion in new infrastructure programs over the next three years, including \$8.1 billion this fiscal year.

[1015]

I feel that rural British Columbia is certainly being listened to, and I'd just like to make that statement.

**N. Simons:** For those in the gallery, the first thing on Monday is that a member from the opposition gets to raise an issue and speak about it for seven minutes. It is replied to by a member of the government for five minutes, in this case, and then I have three minutes to wrap. Usually the titles of these are rather short and not very

descriptive, so that might explain the response of the member from the government side.

But what I would like to talk about is public consultation. I have no problems with the member saying how much money was spent on the project. My issue was not about how much money is being spent on projects. It's about whether the people in the 85 constituencies that we all represent equally are being consulted in the development of public policy, the public policy that impacts all of us.

The second example I had about public consultation not being adequate.... In our environmental assessment processes, the public has fewer and fewer opportunities to say something.

In the Tyson Creek project, I'm afraid to say that the engineers.... The environmental assessment did not anticipate the engineering flaws that resulted in the entrance of harmful substances into the Tzoonie River, which may well have had a negative impact on the salmon.

I would just encourage members to recognize that consultation is not just the ability to speak out, but it's actually taking the requirement that those listening actually incorporate the thoughts and the feelings of those who are expressing them.

I will renew, at this point, the need in my constituency for a land and resource management plan, something that 85 percent of the province has. Powell River-Sunshine Coast still does not, despite a promise from the previous minister. That is a forum in which all sectors can come and talk about specific issues relating to the land use, the sharing of resources, and it's an opportunity for public consultation to be robust and meaningful.

In my opinion, robust and meaningful public consultation is the cornerstone of democracy. I encourage members of government and members of the opposition to remember that when they're creating legislation, passing new regulations or developing standards for the protection of our environment and the protection of our democracy.

#### WORKING TOGETHER TOWARDS A STRONGER ECONOMY

**D. Horne:** I stand today to speak about working together for a stronger economy. It's extremely important, and I've spoken about this before — about building teams, building partnerships, opening borders, playing upon the strengths of those on our team, of those that we work together with.

As many opposite will know, I personally feel that it's very, very important to build relationships, to work with people, to listen to what others have to say and to play upon the strengths and the perspective that others bring to the table. I think by doing that we are much stronger.

I'd like to talk more about the ability to do that and the importance of doing that in building our economy.

Obviously, building walls around oneself — not reaching out, not expanding one's horizons — is a recipe for disaster in the long run.

We are in a global economy. We are in a position where we must compete on a global basis in order to be successful. In order for us to do that, building upon our strengths and attracting others, attracting our neighbours not only within Canada but within our region, is extremely important.

[1020]

We saw the importance of the new west partnership. The importance of the new west partnership with Alberta and Saskatchewan was highlighted recently when the Premier went to Asia and travelled to Japan and China with the Premiers from Alberta and Saskatchewan and really demonstrated firsthand how by working together as a team, by showing the strength of our three provinces — British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan with our combined gross domestic product of \$555 billion — we can be far more successful than simply by being out on our own.

I brought forward to the House a motion earlier in this session and talked about the importance of this new west partnership, the importance of working together. One of the comments at that time that was made was the fact that Manitoba wasn't a part of the new west partnership. I agree.

I think that we should continue to reach out. I think we should continue to expand and build the team, because whether it's Manitoba or Ontario or Quebec, British Columbia is the gateway to Asia. British Columbia is the gateway to the Asia-Pacific and the trade and the opportunities that exist within Asia. So Ontario's success in China or Ontario's success in Korea or in Japan is British Columbia's success. We must embrace that. We must continue to work with all of the provinces in Canada, make sure that we are successful.

Obviously, we've done this very, very well in the beginning with the nucleus of the new west partnership. As I say, we must continue to support ongoing trade, to make sure that, as we're working together, we don't duplicate and work at odds with each other, to make sure that we play upon each of our province's strengths and that, basically, each of us prop each other up and make ourselves much more attractive when it comes to Asia.

When the new west agreement was introduced to the National Development and Reform Commission, China's largest macroeconomic management agency, as well as China's Ministry of Commerce, the China Investment Corporation and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, they were overwhelmed. They thought this was just a wonderful undertaking that made our province and the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, by joining together, so much stronger, made us so much more attractive and made it so much easier.

China wants to invest here in Canada. China wants to invest and be a player here in Canada. By showing a joint, unified showing in China, we show the strength. We show that we're willing to work and collaborate together, which is a very important trait for the Chinese. You know, consensus, working together, being part of a team, is something that is very much a part of the Asian tradition.

As Canada's Pacific Gateway, British Columbia has much to gain from increasing our trade relationships, as I've said. One of the strengths that British Columbia has is not only our proximity to Asia and the amount of time that it takes for goods to move from Asia here to British Columbia but the fact that once they arrive here in British Columbia with the rail network that we have, we can move those goods not only into Canada very, very quickly but into the United States as well. Our ability to promote this and our responsibility to promote this is very, very important.

The Premiers highlighted, when they were in China and with Asia, the many geographic infrastructures, with our ports, our rail systems, the proximity to the U.S. market — all of the opportunities. Working together and showing a unified voice — this was extremely, extremely important. Premiers Campbell, Wall and Stelmach also met with senior officials from the Ministry of Economy, Trade....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, no names. Remember, Member.

**D. Horne:** Oh, sorry.

The Premier also met with the senior officials for the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry in Japan and Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[1025]

So in building our trade with Japan as well, as I've said, by building these bridges, by working together as a team, British Columbia, western Canada — hopefully, eventually Manitoba as part of western Canada — will continue to be vibrant, will continue to build a strong economy here and will continue to prosper with greater trade with Asia as we build for the future of all of us here in British Columbia.

**D. Black:** It is my pleasure to rise in the House today and respond to the member for Coquitlam–Burke Mountain and his statement about the new west partnership. The member and his government say this is about "working together to build a stronger economy," but let's take a moment and look at what the new west partnership is really about.

The statement put out by the governments of B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan on the new west partnership says this agreement will "break down trade barriers." I'd

like to know what exactly these barriers are. The new west partnership agreement says that B.C. and Alberta are already in full compliance, so that must mean that these barriers are in the province of Saskatchewan. If that's the case, why do the most recent figures show that Saskatchewan's interprovincial imports have risen 70 percent between 1999 and 2008?

It doesn't speak to barriers. It's evident the provinces did not need the new west partnership or TILMA to work together on issues like research or international trade. They've worked together on issues like this before. The Saskatchewan government had economist John Helliwell analyze the proposal of TILMA, which did not go through and which the new west partnership is built upon.

Helliwell found that trade is essentially unfettered among provinces. But you know, there are some pretty significant areas where B.C. does differ from the other western provinces, areas that this agreement does not address. If this Liberal government really cared about good jobs for British Columbians and promoting uniformity with our provincial neighbours, then why haven't they taken action to raise our minimum wage?

B.C.'s minimum wage is lower than in any of the western provinces. In fact, B.C.'s minimum wage is the lowest in all of Canada. Another significant area where this government differs from the other western provinces is on the matter of the HST. The other western provinces had decided not to implement the harmonized sales tax. Manitoba's Finance Minister said: "We are not prepared to risk the economic recovery by undermining Manitoba's growing consumer confidence."

So how realistic is it for us to harmonize the economies of the new west partnership signatories when we're the only one whose government is persisting in implementing this regressive tax? Basically, what we're seeing is the Liberal government claiming to care about B.C.'s economy but showing absolutely no real concern for British Columbians' household economies, for the economies of working families in British Columbia.

They're also showing no concern for small businesses — like restaurants, hairdressers and funeral homes — which will soon be suffering when the HST is implemented. So all of the government rhetoric about how the new west partnership will strengthen our economy is actually simply window dressing. The new west partnership, like TILMA before it, was introduced and signed with a complete lack of consultation with British Columbians.

I have to question what the government is so afraid of. There are legitimate concerns that have been articulated that these types of agreements only serve to facilitate the race to the bottom in terms of employment standards and environmental regulations. The government should have consulted, consulted broadly with the public instead of getting together behind closed doors

and signing an agreement like this. Negotiating TILMA in secret caused B.C.'s municipal governments to reject that agreement.

Clearly, this government has a complete inability to learn from the mistakes of its past in order to negotiate agreement that reflects what would be the best interests of all British Columbians.

I urge the government to look at the input of people from municipalities and organizations in British Columbia, where they've shared with the government their concerns about this kind of an agreement and their need and their desire to communicate with government, to have consultation that one of the members talked about earlier — broad consultation that does listen to and include the voice of all British Columbians.

[1030]

**D. Horne:** You know, I would agree with the member opposite on some points. Obviously, one of the things that I think is very, very important in western Canada is to build trade to build and strengthen things. Obviously, the foundation that we have is building.

If you take a look at exports to Asia in 2001 by the new west members — British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan — it has increased by 41 percent, totaling \$19.8 billion in 2009. As well, this includes \$6.6 billion in total exports to China and \$5.8 billion to Japan, which we were talking about — the importance of Asia to British Columbia as well as to the western provinces.

So yes, we do have a good and strong relationship with Alberta and Saskatchewan, and a growing one with Manitoba, one would hope.

You know, we talk about the HST. The HST is one of the single most important things that we can do when it comes to export and our export economy, because the fact of the matter is that right now we have substantial PST embedded in the price of our goods.

The fact also exists — the member is right — that Alberta doesn't have a provincial sales tax. So just to level the playing field with Alberta alone.... The HST goes a substantial way in doing that. It allows our businesses to compete on a level playing field so that our businesses don't have all of the embedded PST in their computers, in their software, in all of the other goods and materials that they use as inputs into the goods and services that they deliver. That's important.

Also, when it comes to the minimum wage that the member mentioned.... One of the things that I find extremely important about the minimum wage is that I see the minimum wage as a floor. You know, one must always look at that floor and make sure that it is all right. But the fact of the matter is that many of those who make that minimum wage are making tips and other income other than simply the minimum wage.

So when we should talk about the minimum wage, we have to look at the average wages that members receive.

If you take a look at our youth wage at over \$12, our average wage at over \$18.... While this is a very, very important thing to look at all the time, I think it's only one aspect. As I say, working together with the provinces is very, very important, and obviously, consultation is important.

I thank the member for her comments.

## FERRIES

**G. Coons:** Our coastal ferry system is a critical part of British Columbians' transportation system. It's our marine highway. Hundreds of thousands of British Columbians and visitors rely on it to transport goods, foods and themselves from the Lower Mainland to the islands in ferry-dependent coastal communities. In a typical year our marine highway carries over 20 million passengers and 8 million vehicles. Our network is so significant that it has been deemed an essential service.

In 1960, 50 years ago this June, the province launched our new ferry system. On June 15 B.C. Ferries will celebrate 50 years of service. Imagine that, Madam Speaker — 43 years of continuous service up and down our coast, ensuring that the social and economic contract with all communities was maintained and strengthened.

I say 43 years. Something significant happened in 2003, which I will get into shortly.

Back in 1960 it was simple: two vessels, one route, two terminals and around 200 employees. The service linked Victoria, the provincial capital on Vancouver Island, to the city of Vancouver and the rest of the mainland. The mission of the day was fairly straightforward: provide a safe, dependable marine transportation link.

It now has 36 vehicles travelling between 47 terminals on 25 routes and a staff exceeding 4,700 in the summer months.

Now, a dramatic change occurred on April 1, 2003. The current government enacted the Coastal Ferry Act, which transformed and converted our indispensable Crown corporation into a quasi-privatized entity that was described by the Auditor General in 2006 as having a hybrid governance structure that has never been tested and is "accountable neither to government as a Crown corporation nor to shareholders as a private corporation."

[1035]

This was done, basically, with no consultation with ferry-dependent communities or the coastal council of the day. There was minimal debate in the Legislature, and it was passed through with significant flaws.

The Auditor General, in his 2006 report on this transformation, highlighted:

"The ferry system is critical to B.C.'s coastal economy. Vancouver Island, the Gulf Islands and many communities up and down the length of the west coast are almost entirely dependent on this system to transport both people and a wide range of products, including fuel and food. At present there is no alternative service that can handle the volume.

"This importance has been recognized in the Coastal Ferry Act, which deems that 'the delivery of ferry services is necessary for the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the residents of British Columbia.' In short, the ferries provide an essential service."

Now, the Auditor General in 2006 saw many flaws in the Coastal Ferry Act, in the governance legislation put forward by the government — many impacting accountability, transparency and the risk to taxpayers under the imposed legislation. The Auditor General had concerns about the lack of criteria for meeting objectives, no performance measures relating to the quality of service, only the quantity of service.

There is no comprehensive summary report by the Minister of Transportation to the Legislature that he recommended. The implicit conflict within the two boards of directors — the authority and the B.C. Ferries board of directors.... He highlighted the monopoly position of B.C. Ferries, acting like it actually had a competitor, and how ridiculous section 69 actually was as far as alternate service providers. And there were concerns about B.C. Ferries being exempt from freedom of information.

The Auditor General, along with....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, might I remind you that some of this information is being discussed in a bill before the House.

**G. Coons:** This is the Auditor General's report from 2006. Thank you, hon. Chair. The Auditor General saw that the reservation system basically was a cash cow not being regulated.

Now, seven years have passed since this transformation and 3½ years since the December 2006 report from the Auditor General. We've seen skyrocketing fares from 60 percent on the major routes to about 120 percent on some of the minor routes. We've seen service cuts and the breaking of this social and economic contract with ferry-dependent communities.

In 2008, as critic for the opposition, I travelled to 28 coastal communities. I consistently heard the same message — that high fares are negatively affecting coastal communities. They feel they've been abandoned. There has been an erosion of public oversight and accountability.

People do not want private highways and do not want a private ferry system. But more importantly, what I heard and what I believe members in the House heard was that the cornerstone of ferry policy must be the public interest, not the corporate profit margin. A key component that I heard and that I brought back to the Legislature was that access to affordable and reliable transportation options must be considered a right for all parts of our great province.

Now, within the province there are 12 ferry advisory committees, and they each have their chairs. Their goal is to promote reliable, affordable, viable, safe ferry service that supports the vitality of B.C.'s ferry-dependent

communities and allows them to contribute to the economic health of the province.

They had major anxieties with the exponential growth of fares on the non-major routes resulting from, as they say, the Coastal Ferry Act in 2003. And recently we've heard about large salaries for directors and executives of B.C. Ferries, and that came out because the Canadian Securities Association deemed that they must bring that out.

What we need to do is ensure that there's a principle to have the commissioner look after the public interest in making decisions. The direction we need to take with our marine highway is a very important issue that is at the top of the agenda for those who depend upon our vital ferry services.

At this point in time I look forward to hearing the response from the other side.

[1040]

**R. Howard:** First, I would like to thank the member for North Coast for bringing this forward. I would have to say that I am extremely happy to contrast the government's past decade of success and strong management with the B.C. ferry system to that of the experience of the opposition when they were in power in the '90s, and the mismanagement and neglect.

On the government side we believe a ferry system that is independently regulated, self-financed and free from political interference is able to offer better, safer, more reliable and more cost-effective service for users. In response to the fast ferries fiasco of the '90s, this government transformed B.C. Ferries in April 2003 from a Crown corporation into an independent commercial organization, free of political interference.

B.C. Ferries released the results of its 2009 customer satisfaction tracking survey, which indicated that 91 per cent of customers reported being satisfied with the overall B.C. Ferries experience. This government also established the B.C. Ferry Commission to regulate fares and service levels of B.C. Ferry Services on the 25 saltwater routes. The commission is independent of both government and B.C. Ferries and is obligated to protect the public interest.

B.C. Ferries is now governed by an independent board comprising members selected by the communities serviced by B.C. Ferries, by the union and by the province, and is advised by 12 regional ferry advisory committees that represent a broad base of residents and customers in ferry-dependent communities. Of course, B.C. Ferries is required to hold annual general meetings where the public can attend, be brought up to date, ask questions and learn of future plans.

In 2009 the Minister of Transportation asked the comptroller general to undertake a review of B.C. Ferries operations. The review found that B.C. Ferries is generally operating well, including applying appropriate financial and management controls and strategies for

limiting cost, increasing revenue and ensuring quality customer service.

The report made a number of other recommendations to further improve B.C. Ferries operations. These included improving transparency by subjecting B.C. Ferries and the B.C. Ferry Authority to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, ensuring compensation for future B.C. Ferries executives and board is comparable to public sector organizations, strengthening governance by separating the B.C. Ferry Services board of directors from the B.C. Ferry Authority, including reservation fees....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, as I reminded the previous member, this is a part of a bill that's before the House at the moment and under discussion.

**R. Howard:** Of course, Madam Speaker. Thank you.

I'll switch to talking about the record of investments in the ferry system. Taxpayers will subsidize B.C. Ferries with \$200 million in support — \$161 million from the province and \$39 million from the federal government to maintain service levels and keep fares affordable. The provincial subsidy has more than doubled since the opposition was in power.

As I've said, independence has freed B.C. Ferries from political interference and allows them access to financial markets to build new ferries and upgrade terminals. B.C. Ferries will replace 26 old vessels by 2023, and since 2007 B.C. Ferries has added seven new ships to the new fleet. For better travel experiences \$247 million has been invested in terminal upgrades between 2003 and 2009, and another \$170 million in terminal upgrades is expected between 2009 and 2014.

The previous member talked about fare increases, and I'd like to just contrast the difference between the two governments, the two decades. Between 1991 and 1999 the NDP increased B.C. Ferry rates by 70 percent. Despite that significant fare hike, B.C. Ferries' debt increased 1,800 percent from \$60 million in 1991 to \$1.1 billion in 2000. The ferry system was chronically underfunded. The subsidy today is \$200 million. In 1997 it was \$5 million. The 1990 NDP government blew \$463 million on fast ferries that never worked and that today are being barged to Abu Dhabi.

I'd like to contrast that record with the high customer satisfaction ratings of today. I'd like to contrast that with the professional management of today. I'd like to contrast that with community access and independent governance.

[1045]

Interjections.

**Deputy Speaker:** If members can maintain their decorum so that the member for North Coast can conclude debate. Thank you.

**G. Coons:** I thank the member for Richmond Centre for responding. It's unfortunate that the government couldn't find anybody that actually has a ferry-dependent community to talk to this. I'm a bit disappointed. Instead of a debate about our ferry service, we hear a bit of a tirade about other decades. I suggest the member dust off the cobwebs, take a giant leap into the 21st century and see where we actually need to go with our ferry service.

For five years we've been talking about the concerns of the ferry service with the legislation that was put in, in 2003: skyrocketing fares, no accountability, no transparency, two boards created that were a total conflict of interest, a B.C. Ferries hierarchy with overpaid CEOs and bloated remunerated boards, an authority....

Interjections.

**Deputy Speaker:** One moment, Member.

Order, Members. This is private members' time. Please allow the member the opportunity to continue.

**G. Coons:** Thank you, Madam Chair.

As the member mentioned, and he tried to get into the legislation before us, there were many concerns that we've been talking about and that finally may be addressed. I believe that the big voices from the ferry advisory committee chairs that the member referred to.... They want to ensure that in any movement with our B.C. Ferries in the future there must be a seventh principle added to the Coastal Ferry Act — to make it clear that the ferry commissioner should take the public interest into account when making decisions.

Unless that happens, there's going to be a continual push towards a privatized model where nobody is looking after the public interest, a recipe for disaster, a perfect storm — rising fuel costs and surcharges, increasing fares, labour shortages, vessels breaking down, aging workforce, safety incidents and declining traffic. They need a direction and mandate that's clear, not one that is clouded over — the profit-over-service model that will destroy and devastate ferry-dependent communities.

It's an integral part of our transportation network, and there are many sectors that are feeling the pain, the impacts of poor ferry legislation. Tourism, the trucking industry, construction, commuters and students, businesses, seniors — they're all suffering from outrageous fare increases and decrease in ridership.

It's the price elasticity. As fares go up, ridership goes down. It's a huge impact on our ferry-dependent communities. What we need to do in this Legislature, in this House, with any legislation coming forward is ensure that the public interest is taken into account and that we maintain that social and economic contract that was broken in 2003.

## STRONG WALLS FOR SOLID FUTURES

**N. Letnick:** The urban age is upon us in B.C., Canada and around the world. For the first time in history more people worldwide now live in cities than in the countryside. It is estimated that virtually all world population growth for at least the next 50 years will be in cities, and the cities of the developing world will absorb most of this increase. This phenomenon should be viewed positively because there is general agreement that urbanization is fundamental to sustained national economic growth.

Indeed, no country has achieved higher income status without greater urbanization. However, with urbanization the gap between rich and poor becomes more obvious and is often a challenge for governments to manage effectively. Worldwide the increasing concentrated poverty in urban slums is a consequence of urbanization.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

One billion people now live in slums in the developing world. For example, of the 500,000 people who migrate to Delhi, India each year, it is estimated that fully 400,000 end up in slums. By 2015 Delhi alone will have a slum population of over ten million people. While it is true that in Canada and British Columbia our fiscal challenges pale in comparison to those in many developing countries, we are not immune to the challenges of appropriate housing.

Housing that is too costly, in need of repair or overcrowded can be a large drain on the resources and health of its occupants. Some Canadians may have limited choice about where they live and their housing conditions.

[1050]

Because housing costs can take up a large portion of a household budget, these costs could make the difference between comfortably meeting all basic needs and being financially strained. In the first half of the '90s, the proportion of households in core housing need in Canada increased by two percentage points. Since then the proportion of core housing need dropped by three percentage points from 16 percent in '96 to 13 percent in 2006.

In a recent report by the CMHC several groups were identified as having, on average, greater housing challenges than other Canadian households. Many of these groups are highly represented in British Columbia and go some way to explain why B.C. and Ontario in 2006 had 14.6 percent of households with core housing need, slightly higher than the national average of 12.7 percent.

Some of these target groups include households comprised of one or more unattached individuals, aboriginal households and households headed by recent

immigrants. For example, households headed by a lone parent or unattached elderly person were roughly twice as likely as Canadian households to be in core housing need. Among recent immigrant households, 35 percent were in core housing need.

In 2006 households in Canada's largest urban areas had higher than average incidence of core housing need at 13.6 percent, significantly lower than the two largest urban areas with the greatest percentage of households in need — Toronto at 19 percent and Vancouver at 17 percent. Outside of the largest urban areas, only 9 percent of households were in core housing need.

With much of our B.C. population growth occurring in aboriginal and immigrant families and also in the greater Vancouver area, government must continue to play an important and direct supportive role in strengthening the economy, creating good jobs and lending a helping hand to those who find themselves in need of housing assistance.

As many areas of B.C., especially the Lower Mainland, continue to attract retiring boomers and investors from around the world, the pressure on housing prices will continue to trend upwards.

In order to maintain effective workforces, major B.C. cities will have to continue investing in mass public transit to bring workers in from farther distances, where land for residential construction is less expensive, and move forward on densification of city centres, areas surrounding arterial roads, mass transit routes and other city areas conducive to higher-density living.

By setting the right fiscal and policy decisions for economic growth, citizens can be empowered to help themselves achieve a higher standard of living and make the choices that are right for them and their families given the challenges and opportunities of a free market economy.

However, even with the strongest of economies, there are some who will need assistance with housing. That is why the B.C. government has provided over \$2 billion in the past eight years in housing and rental subsidies to ensure that low-income British Columbians have access to affordable housing. This year alone the province will invest over \$562 million to provide affordable housing and fight homelessness, which is more than four times as much as in 2001.

In my home riding on Friday, May 14, government announced the investment of \$7.3 million to help construct a supportive housing project. This investment will create 49 new units of housing for adults who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. This project is the third development to move forward under the partnership between the province and the city of Kelowna. The city of Kelowna provided the land.

The other two currently under construction are Willowbridge, a 40-unit apartment building complex with support services managed by the Canadian Mental

Health Association, and Tutt Street Place, a 39-unit apartment complex managed by the New Opportunities for Women Canada Society, which will cater to women in need with or without children.

These three projects in Kelowna exemplify government's commitment to partnership in building social housing. By working together with local governments and non-profit societies, we ensure that all stakeholders have the opportunity to contribute to this important part of municipal infrastructure.

We are also bringing together the skills and know-how that will ensure that the project is successful and efficiently run, helping to build strong walls for a solid future one community at a time, one person and family at a time, and for all a better British Columbia.

**M. Karagianis:** I'm happy to respond to the statements this morning from the member for Kelowna–Lake Country. I think he's laid out very clearly some aspects of the challenge that we have here in British Columbia.

Recently the Children and Youth Committee held poverty hearings in Vancouver, and we had seven very compelling presentations from experts right across the whole scope of family poverty and child poverty.

[1055]

Interestingly enough, the recommendations from a whole diverse group of individuals all had very key components. Housing played a very, very significant role in that.

One of the presenters talked about the issue of aboriginal health and health outcomes, and laid out very clearly that poverty, education and housing challenges are the top three factors for poor health in aboriginal families. Intergenerational poverty, in fact, gets passed on in the lifetime of those children who are raised in those environments without those key needs being met.

Repeatedly we heard from organizations that the challenge of poverty, and the fact that it affects such a vast number of families and of children in British Columbia, is a dire need here in British Columbia, which I think both sides of the House need to engage in. It needs to be an issue that is non-partisan, which rises above the concerns or ideological clashes that often occur between political parties here.

The poverty hearings demonstrated another significant issue we have here above what is, I guess, the common perception of poverty. I know that the previous speaker talked about some of the statistics around poverty in urban areas, who was affected and the concentration we have on the hard-to-house and the homeless and the crisis that's occurred in the last ten to 15 years around homelessness. But I think what came through very loud and clear in the poverty hearings that we held was the growing crisis of poverty among working families.

In fact, I think that is where we see a growing trend that is very disturbing, and we can see across this province

that poverty is now striking at families where there may be more than one income coming into that household. The reality is that the lack of an increase in minimum wage for almost a decade here, the lack of incomes that are family-supporting, has led more and more families in this province to find themselves at the threshold of poverty or sinking below. The fact that we have more and more families looking to food banks, I think, is a strong indication of the need for us to come out with a strategy which is more effective.

Since 2001 we have not engaged in building affordable supportive family housing here in the province. We have in fact neglected that opportunity here for almost a generation now. That needs to be one of the determinations we come forward with, if we recognize that there is concern about housing. We recognize the pressure in urban and rural communities around providing housing. We know it's a significant component of the poverty challenge that we have.

We've had recommendations from experts repeatedly across a whole broad spectrum of political representation that talks about the core need to raise the minimum wage, provide good, affordable, effective child care and deal with the growing housing crisis.

So if we're not going to build affordable housing for families, then we have to find other ways to help make sure that working families are not finding themselves in such a crisis of housing that they are sinking lower and lower into the poverty realm.

If we truly want to deal with this, if we recognize the challenges as the member so clearly laid out in the statistics there, then I think we have to make that promise to British Columbians that we will work together with the federal government. They've abrogated their responsibility for building any kind of supported family housing.

Here in the province of British Columbia, we haven't seen a plan where we move forward into building affordable family housing. We have to make that one of the primary goals that will help achieve this challenge and rectify the challenge that we see.

I would hope that the indication by the speaker here says that we can address this in a non-partisan or bi-partisan way and talk about how we provide more opportunities to make sure that families don't have a housing crisis in the future.

**N. Letnick:** Well, I find it interesting that the member would say we have to find a non-partisan way when she uses words like "abdicated our responsibility," which is partisan in the extreme.

[1100]

Let me first say that, as I previously stated, the housing challenge is worldwide and not specific to our borders alone. I remember in 1992, after first being elected to Banff town council, I spent two terms leading a housing corporation. We built over \$20 million of non-market

housing. It was a great improvement, but it wasn't a complete solution.

When I moved to Kelowna, I did the same thing — worked on housing solutions. We did a lot of work there — a great team. But again, we have to find more ways to attack the problem. I guess it's been with us since we've started being people, and it's going to be with us forever in the future. We just have to make sure we continue to chip away and chip away at it.

I find that two of the best ways to get people out of poverty are to continue to build an economic condition where people want to invest in this province — and this government has clearly done that — and also to look at education, the billions of dollars that this government's invested in education. That's probably the number one key out of poverty, an educated person, so we continue to do that.

As far as the amount of money that people are making, we've talked about poverty. If you look at 2002 dollars from 1990 to '99, take-home pay dropped by \$1,500 under the previous government. However, under this government, with the economic policies it's come up with, per capita it's increased by \$4,482, again giving more economic opportunities and choices to citizens. I think it's important to look at the big picture when someone's talking about poverty and also to look over time spans.

On the housing side, last week's announcement, the province is partnering with the city of Vancouver and Streethome Foundation to provide over a thousand new supportive housing units in Vancouver.

Since 2001 the provincial government has committed to creating approximately 18,000 new units of housing. This compares to 13,000 units during the previous government's term.

Through a \$50 million investment in the aboriginal housing initiative, approximately 200 off-reserve housing for youth, women and elders who are struggling with addictions. The list goes on and on. No homeowner's grant threshold for people with disabilities, veterans or seniors.

The province is investing \$6 million in annual funding for B.C. Housing for homeless outreach. Emergency shelter program — over 1,500 permanent year-round beds in 63 shelters, compared to 850 beds in 2001; over 1,350 extreme weather response bases.

Rental assistance programs — over 8,000 low-income families. The SAFER program — 15,800 senior households. That's 3,600 more than 2001. The list goes on and on.

It's interesting that the member would say we shouldn't be bringing this into the political realm, but obviously, we both need to work on continuing the great progress that's been done over the last nine years. I look forward to helping government any way I can.

**Hon. I. Chong:** I call Motion 14.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 14 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

### Private Members' Motions

#### MOTION 14 — SUSTAINABLE WILD SALMON STOCK AND AQUACULTURE

**L. Popham:** I move:

[Be it resolved that the House debate and discuss a plan to ensure a sustainable wild salmon stock and aquaculture sector.]

We had the opportunity to position ourselves to be a world leader in aquaculture over the past decade, but instead, we see the Liberal government turning a blind eye to a problem that is a concern to most British Columbians. What the people of B.C. want is a plan to ensure a sustainable wild salmon stock and aquaculture sector. This is something that the people of B.C. do not see happening under this government.

What they do see is an abandonment of a species that represents ecological success in our province. What we see is that the lack of planning over the past decade has put our wild salmon at risk and has brought them to a point of possible extinction. What a horrendous mark to have on this government's record.

There is more and more evidence that wild salmon are in jeopardy, more argument that we should be giving wild salmon stocks the best opportunity to survive and to thrive. The fact is that the B.C. government has not stood up for our fish, despite the Premier's 2005 call to lead the world in the best fish management, bar none. This was a claim from the 2005 Speech from the Throne, and it was an empty promise. Because it wasn't followed through on, we could see our wild stocks become a thing of the past.

There is real and growing concern among fishers and most British Columbians that fish stocks in B.C. are in trouble, and both the federal and provincial governments are not addressing the problem.

[1105]

From missing sockeye, development on spawning beds, disease in salmon and power generation on river systems to jurisdictional decisions and weakened environmental legislation, both governments appear to be disinterested or, worse, promoting industrial development at the expense of our wild aquatic species.

It's hard to believe that we just celebrated a huge world event, the 2010 Olympics, where salmon were highlighted, yet we see no concern at the policy level. Why is it becoming routine for this government to talk the talk but fail to walk the walk when there is so much to gain? Wild salmon make this province strong, and

it seems that this government is starting to make this province weak.

Last summer some nine million sockeye went missing from the Fraser River stocks. We have many factors affecting this return, but there is mounting evidence that sea lice around open-net fish farms are impacting wild salmon on migratory routes. Why will this government not act on issues that we have control over?

In May of 2007 a special legislative committee released a bipartisan report on sustainable aquaculture. A key recommendation was to transition finfish aquaculture to closed containment.

Closed containment, as the report stated in 2007, will answer many of the concerns that the committee heard in its public hearings and in numerous submissions. It would allow the industry to collect waste. It would avoid the transfer of sea lice and disease between adult farmed salmon populations and juvenile migrating salmon, and it provides a safeguard to protect other marine life, which are attracted to and prey on salmon farms.

The 2007 aquaculture report stands the test of time, and we as New Democrats will continue to demand that the governments implement these recommendations.

Wild salmon are an essential part of our ecosystem, our economy, and it's our duty to future generations to ensure their survival. Early this month more than 4,000 people converged on the Legislature to challenge this government on its failure to protect our wild salmon stocks. The protesters demanded an end to the massive open-net fish farms and the dense stocking of Atlantic salmon. The resulting pollution and sea lice infestations are a likely contributor to the collapse of the stocks.

Far from heeding the will of the people, this government continues to turn a blind eye to the practices of the massive aquaculture corporations on our precious B.C. coast. For example, the ministry continues to refuse to release to the public important information on the scale of farmed-fish sea lice infestations. We need a transparent process, and at this point we see information being withheld.

The public deserves a clear picture of the consequences of open-net fish farms. The public wants a government that supports transition to a sustainable aquaculture industry. As my colleagues discuss and debate and propose options for a sustainable aquaculture industry and policy that protects wild salmon stocks this morning, I suggest the government take note. Ignoring this problem won't solve it.

**D. Hayer:** Thank you to the member for her motion. It's good to see the member for Saanich South is bringing this motion up.

I remember when Joy MacPhail was the leader of the NDP, in 2001 to 2005. Actually, we went on a tour of fish farms and looked at the different aspects of the fish — wild salmon and everything else. For me, it was the first

time I had a really firsthand experience to go to all these places and take a look at all the pros and cons on both sides of it. It was good information.

It is amazing. I was meeting with some students from my constituency earlier today. I was explaining to them that when we're debating, it always seems to be that both sides have different perspectives. One side thinks they're right. The other one thinks they have the proper answers to it.

You know, our government did a lot of great things over the last nine years when you take a look at this initiative, this debate. I'd like to remind the member opposite, because she was not in government at that time. I can tell you this much. Her government, the party she represents, in the 1990s approved 34 fish farms when they were in government for ten years. Our government, compared to them, has only approved 22 fish farms since 2001, and we have learned lessons from the mistakes made in the 1990s. We're trying to improve on them.

We are working with all different governments. We are working with all different non-profit organizations to make sure that we have the best sustainable environment here for the wild salmon and everything else.

[1110]

Our government is already committed to wild salmon, and that commitment is fundamental to provincial fisheries management. We are continually working to protect, maintain and restore fish stocks and fish habitat.

In fact, even in my urban riding of Surrey-Tynehead we have an outstanding Tynehead fish hatchery, operated by a great many volunteers who make up the Serpentine Enhancement Society. They raise fish at that hatchery in Tynehead Park, and they conduct public tours of the hatchery. They are involved with elementary school groups in Surrey to educate and ensure that children appreciate the value and importance of salmon to our economy, to our history and to our future.

Along the northern boundary of my riding runs the mighty Fraser River, which is one of the greatest and biggest rivers in the world. It's the most important river, as it is a lifeline, for the wild Pacific salmon.

There is nothing finer in our ovens or on our barbecues than a fresh wild salmon. We are committed to ensuring that British Columbians will always enjoy the fabulous homegrown product of wild salmon. Granted, the demand for salmon is such that we also need the greater supply that salmon farms provide to us. This government will never desert the wild salmon. That is why we help such fish-rearing centres as the Tynehead hatchery.

We want our current and future generations to continue to enjoy wild salmon. We also want our young students and our community to learn about the value of the wild fish. We want them to learn about the historic importance of salmon to our First Nations and the importance of spawning salmon to sustaining wildlife,

such as the great bears — the spirit bear, the black bear and the mighty grizzly — and the majestic bald eagles which flock to our rivers to feast on our nature's bounty, and our forests, which gain all sorts of nutrition from the carcasses of wild salmon left behind.

We are working with the commercial fishers. We are working with the Marine Stewardship Council. We are working with the Pacific Salmon Forum. We are working with the Cohen Commission and other organizations in the community to improve the conservation of the salmon stock.

We've created the Pacific Coast Collaborative with Washington, California, Oregon and Alaska to get together to share economic and environment issues, including the ocean health, because wild salmon is important not just to British Columbia but to everybody on the west coast and, as a matter of fact, to all of North America.

We have invested tens of millions of dollars in the living rivers trust fund to ensure there will always be free-running rivers for salmon to spawn. Our Ministry of Environment is ever-vigilant to ensure that our environment, our rivers and everything that our rivers have in them or on them or beside them are as clean and pure as they were during the last millennium.

We are aware of the value and the importance of wild salmon to our history and to our economy today and to the future. We will do everything to protect our wild salmon, as we have done over the last nine years, and we will keep on improving as we get more information and more knowledge.

Conserving the wild salmon species and their habitat is fundamental to provincial fisheries management in B.C. That is why we are working to protect, maintain and restore fish stocks and fish habitat.

We want to make sure that the investment that we're putting into the sustainability initiative and working to maintain the enhancement of our aquaculture system.... We're going to work to make sure the salmon are protected, our rivers are protected, our oceans are protected, and we're going to work together with all the different other organizations, and with the opposition, to find some good suggestions, if they have some, to make sure salmon survive in the long term.

I think my time has run out. I'll wait for the next turn to go back and speak more about the wild salmon.

**R. Fleming:** I thank the member for Saanich South for putting this motion on the floor of the assembly this morning for debate. I don't think that any member of the assembly would doubt that our iconic Pacific salmon species are at risk; that they require government leadership; that they require a series of targeted, long-term actions to ensure the health of stocks on the west coast for generations to come.

[1115]

It was after the sockeye collapse last August 2009 that that year was dubbed the official beginning of the salmon crisis of the new century by columnist Stephen Hume. Yet this crisis has been met with absolute silent indifference by the B.C. Liberal government in the months that followed the collapse of that sockeye run. Just a few months after we saw that 90 percent decline on the mighty Fraser, we saw 40,000 farmed Atlantic salmon escape from a Marine Harvest open-net fish farm in the Broughton Archipelago.

In that case the B.C. Liberal government couldn't even describe what actions they were taking to recover those fish. That was a glimpse into how bad and how pathetic the state of fisheries management and the resources that were put into managing our fishing stocks were. That was a revelation about how poor the situation has become in British Columbia.

It is incredible how many British Columbians from all walks of life — who may or may not have a connection to our coast, to the salmon fishery directly — have a shared concern about the sustainability of wild salmon in B.C. in the future. This includes diverse interests like the commercial fishery, the sport fishers, independent scientists, First Nations — organizations and individuals who don't always agree but now agree that there has never been a time that requires more unity and a sense of urgency for concerted, coordinated action.

Again, I contrast that feeling, which is widespread, with the actions of this government, or the lack of actions. This government has no plan to help wild salmon recover and thrive in the future. When they're presented with research that links pesticide runoffs to the decline in salmon returns and their survival, they do nothing to keep those substances out of our waterways.

When the Forest Practices Board issues a report in 2009 that establishes that 40 percent of the 1,000 cut-blocks surveyed showed damage to salmon-bearing riparian areas, again, the B.C. Liberals do nothing to right that situation.

They ignore the Pacific Salmon Forum's recommendations on watershed protection. They ignore the Fraser Basin Council's warning about that river system. They ignore industry groups. They ignore environmental NGOs. They ignore the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs. They ignore everyone who is trying to get through to this government that there is a sense of urgency, that there is a salmon crisis in British Columbia. That's what this government does.

Now, let's match up the words with the actions. You know, it wasn't that many years ago — it was 2005 — that this government boldly declared that B.C. will have the best fisheries management in the world, bar none. Do you remember that golden goal, Madam Chair? I know you do.

Today we have a government that has silently surrendered any fisheries management role to Ottawa and

the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. Imagine going from saying we will be the best in the world to saying that we will have no role in fisheries management. That's what this government has done. That's what speaks to the last five years in particular of B.C. Liberal rule.

The Minister of Environment expressed concern in August with the sockeye collapse numbers — that he had no confidence in the DFO. He had no confidence in Ottawa's ability to get the science right and to know what was happening in our waters. Yet he has not lifted a finger to keep B.C.'s role in comanaging the salmon fishery.

It's incredible to me that this is being allowed to occur. B.C. didn't even bother to defend our comanagement of this resource in the Supreme Court. We dropped our right to appeal the transfer of fisheries control to Ottawa.

It wasn't a question of money. It wasn't a question of not being able to hire lawyers to defend B.C.'s rights to comanage our fisheries, because at the same time that we declined to appeal in that court, the B.C. Liberals were sparing no expense in appealing challenges to Bill 42, the gag law.

Do you remember that one, that controversial bill that imposed severe restrictions on political expression by third parties? That law has come into public view again, because there are B.C. Liberal constituencies that are finding themselves charged by prosecutors for breaking that law.

[1120]

That was appealed. Fisheries in British Columbia was not. It's incredible to me — the sense of misplaced priorities of this government. The future of salmon, our role in managing our coast was surrendered without any appeal from this government, and the Minister of Agriculture is negotiating right now to complete that transfer behind closed doors.

I ask you, Madam Chair and members in this House: can you imagine a single Premier from any of the Atlantic provinces surrendering control over their coastal fisheries management without an agreement that clearly spells out what the shared jurisdiction is going to be; without identifying resources that will rebuild wild fish stocks to sustainable levels; without providing for ongoing consultation, approval and oversight of this resource? Not a chance. There is not a single Atlantic Canada Premier that would tolerate this situation, but the Premier of this province has allowed exactly that to happen.

I know that other members are going to speak to a plan that will work for B.C., a plan that this government has failed to implement. I want to speak to one item, though, before I conclude, and that is the failure of this government to transition our aquaculture to a sustainable, environmentally safe future with closed-containment technology. They've failed to do that, while presiding over this decline in our wild stocks.

They brought in a budget this year — \$400 million for Highway 37 to help the mining industry, but not a penny to help the aquaculture industry move to closed-containment technology, not a single R-and-D grant to do that technology.

We could be leaders. We could be creating green jobs on our coast. We could have the world beating down our door for patents if we get to that technology first. We could show the world that something's happening here in British Columbia.

This government won't support it. They failed to do it year after year, even when their own all-party Finance Committee has recommended exactly that. That speaks very poorly to the sustainability of wild salmon in our future, and that's another reason why we need to change the government.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, I would simply caution the member who just spoke in terms of involving the Chair in debate.

I will recognize the member for Surrey-Tynehead. He seeks leave to make an introduction?

**D. Hayer:** Yes, Madam Speaker.

Leave granted.

### Introductions by Members

**D. Hayer:** As I was stating earlier, I have the pleasure to introduce seven ESL students from grade 9 who are visiting from the Pacific Academy School in my riding, one of the best schools in Canada. Actually, these students' backgrounds.... They were born in Korea, China and Taiwan. They were talking earlier about our debate here, so they can look forward to hearing, from our next speaker, the other side of the story.

Joining them are their teachers, Kevin Krikke and Andrea Mills, who have taken time out of their busy schedules to bring the students here so that they can learn about how the government and this House function. As well, they might be interested in getting involved in politics, so they might be our future MLAs. Would the House please make them very welcome.

### Debate Continued

**D. Barnett:** Well, I stand on this side of the House, proud of the record of this government. I listened to my colleagues across the room. I listened to activists. I listened to those in the aquaculture industry. I listened to scientists. I am not an expert, so where do I gather my information from? From facts.

So today, as I stand here.... I had a different speech written, but I read a newspaper article this morning, so I'm going to read this article about the aquaculture indus-

try and about the salmon industry in British Columbia out of the *Globe and Mail*, an article that was there this morning. It seems that the press, for many reasons from time to time, is the one that the public believes. It's called "Blaming Salmon Farms for Decline Makes for One Fishy Tale."

**N. Simons:** She found one article.

**D. Barnett:** You know, my colleague just said that it's one article, and it's one more opinion, but it's an opinion that maybe we should take a look at. It's about scientific facts, not emotion, as how we should be dealing with this issue. Too often we deal with emotion instead of facts and what's good for the province of British Columbia.

Every time I turn around.... Before I read this article, I will say that too often we forget rural B.C. when we talk about fish.

Fish. We have fish in rural B.C., believe it or not, folks. We have lakes, the most pristine lakes there are. We have the most caring bunch of people there are to look after the environment.

[1125]

Interjection.

**D. Barnett:** Pardon me? We don't have fish farms. But we have fish, and we have rivers, and these rivers do go into the Thompson. They go into the Fraser River, and this is all part of this huge system. The whole province of British Columbia is involved in the rivers, in the aquaculture and the fish industry in British Columbia. We, too, have a say.

Back to the article. I'll just read part of it. It says:

"The one thing that salmon farmers and protesters agree on is that wild salmon stocks have declined.... While pink salmon and chum salmon are abundant, stocks of the species most critical to the commercial and sports fishery have plummeted. Coho and chinook returns are down more than 70 percent since the early '90s, and the 2009 Fraser River sockeye run saw only 1.7 million fish return, when more than ten million were expected" — prompting the federal government to strike a public inquiry.

"The inquiry will have no shortage of possible causes to examine. Some blame global warming. Others blame the impact of dams on spawning fish and even diseases spread from government hatcheries. A hike along silt-laden and sun-exposed spawning streams brings home the destructive legacy of now outlawed logging practices.

"As for fish farming, the inquiry should look at what's happening to salmon stocks where farms are not a factor. For example, returns...to the 2009 commercial fishing season were cancelled.

"But standing high above...this debate stands the elephant in the stream — fishing by both humans and animals. B.C.'s harbour seal population has rocketed to more than 100,000 from 10,000 since the commercial harvest and predation control ended in the '70s, and the population of the even more ravenous Steller's sea lion has grown to about 28,000, the highest in a century. A scientist with the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans has studied the staggering impact of seal and sea lion predation.

"One study of Vancouver Island's Puntledge River found that only three dozen harbour seals killed an estimated 10,000 spawn-

ing adult salmon. It was also calculated that more than three million salmon fry were taken from the river as they swam toward the ocean the following spring. "They take 60 to 70 chum salmon per minute per seal. They eat the fish like popcorn."

So there are many reasons why the salmon population is depleted. We all know that. But I think we have to open up our thinking. We have to look at scientific factors, we have to look at human factors, and we have to look at solutions.

The more I read, the more I listen. Am I concerned? Yes, and we should all be concerned. But we should be working together, and we should listen to those who have the facts, not the fiction and the emotion. I could read the rest of this article, but I would recommend that everybody read it. I am proud of this government's record.

**M. Sather:** Well, the member for Cariboo-Chilcotin that just spoke might want to also note that a group of eminent scientists recently, some 22 in all, from a forum at SFU, concluded that the downward trend in salmon is not due to overfishing. In fact, the percent of the run harvested has been declining for decades.

In any event, it is an issue that's difficult to ascertain. No one has all the answers. But certainly, we have questions about fish farms on this side of the House, even if the member opposite doesn't, and we will continue to pursue those.

We know that this government has a long relationship with the fish farm industry. We know that they get considerable donations from that industry.

[1130]

When this government was first elected, what did they do? There were outstanding charges against a number of fish farms. The first thing they did was say: "Huh. To heck with those. Those are null and void. Those are gone."

How can you do that? How can you just take charges and wipe them off the chart, with the stroke of a pen, for no good reason? That's what this government has done, and they continue at all costs to pursue a single-minded, pro-fish farm.... This is the issue that I have with the government's approach. It's single-minded support at all costs for fish farms without allowing, it seems, any kind of dissent.

I had the good fortune, I guess I could say, of speaking to a couple of the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands fish scientists recently. I certainly acknowledge their credentials. It was interesting to hear them talk about sea lice and fish diseases. To hear them speak, these are naturally occurring. Yes, that's true. Both are naturally occurring.

The inference was that the sea lice problem, if there was any — the disease problem, if there is any — came from the wild salmon. That's not what a whole lot of folks are concerned about, obviously. It overlooks the fact that when you put a whole bunch of fish in a small

area or a whole bunch of human beings or any kind of animal in a small area, they're likely to spread any disease that's out there quite considerably.

Where the sea lice actually came from, where the disease actually came from, is not exactly the issue. The issue is: is it being proliferated, and is it spreading to the wild salmon and causing a great concern?

Now, those scientists talked about temperature of the water and the salinity of the water being a more likely cause. I don't know. I've been asking around. I haven't seen first studies that back this up.

Certainly, as I say, there is a diversity of opinion, and so there should be on any biological issue. Parameters are difficult to measure, and it's almost impossible to control the various factors. That's to be expected.

But there are issues that do give me concern around fish health and fish farms and those diseases. It's astounding to know that the fish farms do report diseases at their farms, but they're not required to. But what is worse than that is the fact that the ministry itself doesn't have to let the public know. How can that be? An industry that is in waters that belong to all Canadians....

They haven't been able to privatize. I know the government is very fond of privatization, and maybe some would like to be able to privatize some of those waters. They haven't been able to do that so far. Those are public waters. Why doesn't the public get to know what kind of disease outbreaks there are on fish farms? But they don't.

With that kind of mismanagement — and that is mismanagement — it's difficult for me as a former biologist myself to actually have a lot of faith in what the government scientists are saying, not because they don't have the credentials or the knowledge, but they're under this kind of political constraint. They're under this constraint that doesn't allow them to be free and open with what's happening on fish farms. That's worrying indeed.

The fact that they don't have to report this to the public. Imagine you're a cattle farmer and you have an outbreak of BSE on your farm. You betcha; that has to be reported to the public. Of course, that's a disease that can directly affect human beings. But the collapse of our sockeye fishery, our salmon fishery, in many respects is having an effect if not directly on the lives of families that are dependent on wild salmon then certainly indirectly on our well-being, so they should be reported.

[1135]

We saw the same thing in the Fraser Valley, where I come from, not that many years ago when we had an outbreak of avian flu in chickens. Wow. The government — in this case it was the federal government — acted quickly and decisively to go in and eradicate those chickens. They took it seriously.

The idea that the salmon farms should be required to take some drastic actions, perhaps to shut down those

farms for a period of time, is certainly not out of order, but there doesn't seem to be any will at all.

Another astounding thing. When there's an outbreak on a fish farm, you know what the ministry staff does? They stay away. They stay away as public policy. That's their policy — to stay away from a fish farm when there's an outbreak of disease. They say it might spread the disease if they go there. Well, I don't get that.

I thought that our folks were out there and our government was directing them out there to be where there's a problem to ensure that the problem was being taken care of and to look after it in the public interest. I mean, when those people were going around to the chicken farms, they had all kinds of biosecure suits and whatnot on. Why can't they do that to go and look at a fish farm? No, they stay away. That seems to be the whole idea of this government — hands off, and stay away.

There are a lot of concerns. I don't see the government addressing it with regard to fish farms, and we certainly look for better things from them in the future, even though we're not that hopeful.

**J. van Dongen:** I'm pleased to speak on this topic. As other members have noted, there are a lot of diverse opinions about the issues of sustainable wild salmon stock and the aquaculture sector.

I spent six years as the opposition critic studying these issues and four years as minister responsible. While there's a lot of diverse opinion, I have to say that a lot of it is not well informed. A lot of it is deliberately biased. A lot of it is intentionally selective.

I categorically reject the opposition's characterization of our government's performance in maintaining wild salmon stock and in managing the aquaculture sector as complacent or not based on science. Our government has had an ongoing commitment to a sound plan for sustainable wild stock, a sustainable wild fishery and a sustainable aquaculture sector.

Since 2001 B.C. has worked with the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, the recreational sector, the commercial fishing sector and commercial fish processors to improve the conservation, sustainability and economic benefits derived from B.C. salmon for our coastal communities.

Since 2001 we have been working to protect our wild salmon stocks while at the same time working to build an environmentally and economically sustainable aquaculture industry for the benefit of all British Columbians. Our work in this respect has always been based on the best science available, and certainly there are all kinds of science available and all kinds of selective quoting of scientific studies.

But it needs to be mentioned that the salmon-farming industry in British Columbia provides 6,000 jobs and over \$224 million in wages for British Columbians. Over half the jobs in B.C. aquaculture are filled by women

and First Nations people in regions such as north Island, where aquaculture is a vital part of the economy providing secure year-round jobs.

Starting in 2001 our province established one of the most comprehensive aquaculture regulatory governance regimes in the world, with strong regulations for escape prevention, waste discharge, monitoring of fish health and sea lice, resources for compliance and enforcement, and an effective partnership between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Ag and Lands for enforcing standards.

[1140]

People make all kinds of comments. I invite people to look at the statistics — for example, for escapes — through the ten years prior to us forming government and the nine years since we formed government. Look at the statistics. Look at the MOU between the Ministry of Environment and the Ministry of Ag and Lands for enforcement of standards. Allegations that our government was complacent or didn't have a plan for sustainability are absolutely incorrect. Both ministries collaborate on an annual compliance and enforcement report.

The 2008 fish health and 2008 compliance and enforcement reports are part of a comprehensive fish health and surveillance program. Data are coordinated by expert field and laboratory technicians and analyzed by veterinarians experienced in fish health.

Our government created the Pacific Salmon Forum — members have quoted the Pacific Salmon Forum — in 2004 as an independent panel of experts to provide balanced, impartial information, advice and recommendations. This independent panel was set up at a cost of \$5 million. They made a number of recommendations, and the elements of those recommendations are included in B.C.'s approach to protecting, restoring and managing watersheds, water and fish habitat.

A few comments about sea lice. Since 2003 sea lice management has been part of government's fish health management plan with a management trigger in B.C. set at three lice per fish, one of the most stringent in the world. The Ministry of Agriculture and Lands and industry actively monitor sea lice abundance and treatment controls. Sea lice are naturally occurring parasites that exist everywhere in our coast and in wild salmon stocks in the normal nature of things. Our government is committed to keeping abreast of the latest science on this issue.

In summary, especially with respect to sea lice, I have to say that just because someone makes high-profile media claims doesn't necessarily make their statements scientifically or factually correct.

Finally, on closed containment, there has been a lot of work done over the years by both government and industry on closed containment, but no one can truthfully say today that closed-containment technology is economically viable. I would caution members to suggest

that closed containment is some kind of utopian solution, because it isn't.

**B. Routley:** As the member of this Legislature from the Cowichan Valley.... Certainly the Cowichan River is one of the heritage rivers in British Columbia, and the issue of salmon is critical to the Cowichan Valley. There is certainly real and serious concern that fish stocks in B.C. are in real trouble and that both the federal and provincial governments are not addressing the problems.

Just recently in the *Vancouver Sun* they report that some scientists in the federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans are warning that the outlook for 2010 is already worse than it was in 2009. That would be tragic indeed, when you consider that only 10 percent of the expected Fraser sockeye returns even materialized — dramatic impact indeed.

Just one of the many problems impacting fish are the environmental concerns of some of the fish-farming practices. As we've talked about, the report of the bipartisan committee recommended that we move away from the current fish-farming practices and move to closed containment.

While there are many culprits — certainly, you can look at global warming as a very real issue, overfishing, past poor logging practices or agriculture practices.... It's true that there are a lot of impacts, but nonetheless it's interesting to hear everybody point the other way, including the folks that are supporting fish farming as it is and not looking at what's happening with the move to closed containment.

[1145]

You know, when you look at what's happening now with major food suppliers showing a trend to move towards sustainable food production practices, certainly many enlightened thinkers believe that we need to move towards full environmental impact costs in everything we do, every kind of fishing. Certainly fish farming is part of that, where we need to look at environmental impacts.

One needs to look no further than the disaster in Chile and what happened there with infectious salmon anemia that wiped out the stocks. It was a very serious problem indeed, and we need to look at other opportunities. So moving to fish farming in closed containment is clearly the way of the future.

You only need to look at somebody that I know the other side of the House has great respect for. You know, look at the Jimmy Pattison Group. They have now talked about.... Here it is, April 22, a news release where Overwaitea and Save-On-Foods are moving to on-land, closed-containment system of SweetSpring brand of freshwater coho salmon grown by AquaSeed. It's one of the first commercially available land-based salmon farms. You see that here in B.C., we've already got major

food producers starting to recognize that the demand will be there for environmentally sensitive-produced food, and that includes fish.

When you look at other jurisdictions — for example, the Target stores down in the United States — they recently, in January of 2010, made a major announcement. They said: "In an unprecedented policy shift, the Target Corporation" — one of the largest retailers in the United States — "has just today announced the elimination of all farmed salmon products from its stores." That's stunning. Certainly, British Columbia producers need to be aware of these kinds of trends and that they intend also to exclusively use wild Alaskan salmon or salmon from producers — such as the coho being produced in Washington.

Another one, Safeway, announced January 26 that they're going to move to sustainable-produced seafood products. They say that Safeway will implement a traceability system to screen out suppliers of seafood products not meeting Safeway's new sustainable seafood policy. The agreement between Safeway and FishWise is consistent with other companies moving in that direction.

So the recommendation to move to fish farming is clearly where we're going to land in the future. I believe that government, and certainly our side of the House, would be committed to ensure that any government action to impact workers in a move to closed containment must include a transition strategy.

I'm optimistic, however, that in the future there are going to be many more jobs created by moving to on-shore, closed-containment-type facilities. I certainly know that our government would support the workers involved, would not see them thrown to the side, and would ensure that they had opportunities for employment.

**R. Cantelon:** I'm glad to enter into this debate. It's been a very contentious one. It's been a debate in public and in this House on what I would call, basically, a difference between myth and fear, or I should say it's been about myth and fear rather than about established science.

The member opposite from Lake Cowichan.... I'm sure he's very concerned, as he has just expressed, about the effect that it might be having on his union brothers. Certainly we on this side of the House, too, respect that, and I have in my hand here a letter from the United Steelworkers, Local 1, chapter 1937. They're commenting on some things they saw on the member for Saanich South's website.

[1150]

They say, if I may read from the letter — I'd like to read it into the record: "What is disappointing about Ms." — and it's the member for Saanich South — "endorsement is that it is based on bias and politics, not on science." If we've learned anything and if we can learn anything, it's to move to science-based study of this, but instead we tend to slide back into myth and fear exclusively.

Their union membership goes on to say — and I'm sure the member from Cowichan is very concerned about the brothers: "Our union and our membership who work in the salmon aquaculture industry strongly support protection of wild salmon." I think that's true of everybody on both sides of this House. "We also strongly support a sustainable salmon aquaculture industry. The aquaculture industry is already one of the most regulated industries in British Columbia" — as indicated by the member opposite from Abbotsford. Basically, we came into a situation where it was totally unregulated.

People still have the myth that somehow hormones are given to salmon in salmon farms. That is not the case. In fact, the member opposite alluded to a disease in some Chilean fish that nearly wiped out their industry. A lot of people aren't aware that every single salmon going into a salmon farm is inoculated against six different diseases.

The other member — for Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows, I think — displayed his lack of understanding of the integrity that's kept, strict integrity for disease control. He suggests that people should just be able to walk from one fish farm to another, perhaps carrying a disease from one fish farm to another. That is why they're regulated extremely carefully when there is a disease outbreak.

I have personally examined and visited fish farms. The member may not be aware — I am sure he is not aware — that there are extensive antiseptic steps that you take before you enter a fish farm. You have to dip your feet in an antiseptic bath before you're allowed on a fish farm. So what he regards as careless administration is actually to prevent diseases from spreading. I reiterate that the disease control measures and the regulation are very, very, very strict — the best in the world.

The union members go on to say: "There's no reason why wild salmon and farmed salmon cannot co-exist." Now, what we've repeatedly heard is that great myth of closed containment, and the member from Cowichan expressed his lack of understanding of closed containment. He mentioned that on land, closed containment can work. Indeed, that was tried not long ago in Cedar, in an area just north of his riding.

Basically, what happened was that you have to control the oxygen; you have to control the temperature; you have to control the salinity. If a pump fails, the fish die. That's what happens.

Interjection.

**R. Cantelon:** I'm glad the member opposite for Saanich South expressed her concern about the one in Campbell River. I'm glad she commented on that. Thank you for raising that, because this was endorsed by David Suzuki. Let me tell you about that. So 70 percent of the benthic material flushes through and out the other side. No filtration. Only 30 percent is gathered at the bottom.

Now, this 30 percent of feces that's gathered at the bottom is pumped on shore, and of course, it's impregnated with salt. I asked the member — it was the member from David Suzuki. I said: "Well, this doesn't meet your criteria of a barrier wall, a solid wall between. How does this in fact prevent diseases either from coming in, going out or being controlled?"

Interjection.

**R. Cantelon:** I absolutely have the facts right, and I stand by them completely.

Then you pump these salty feces on shore. How do you separate the salt from them? Well, engineers at some point in the great future will figure that out. Well, not yet. It hasn't been done anywhere worldwide.

The member opposite also pointed out that the Salmon Forum has spent \$5 million collecting scientists on both sides of this argument, and I encourage the development and the spreading of good scientific data and information. Certainly, it's an extremely important aspect to all British Columbians. But the Salmon Forum, after \$5 million of studies, including both sides of the argument from Marty Krkošek to Dick Beamish to Brian Riddell and so forth....

Our recommendations also see a future where salmon farming is viewed as an important economic driver and the legitimate user of the marine environment that is compatible — compatible — with healthy wild salmon populations.

I would close by saying that wild fish generally are the last wild animal we hunt commercially for food, and we're getting better and better at it. Perhaps we're getting too good. With that, I'll sit down.

**B. Simpson:** I look forward to the member for Parksville-Qualicum quoting Steelworkers when it comes to forest policy, as well, in this province. It's not sufficient to just simply pick and choose facts and letters and all sorts of things, as we've seen in this debate.

[1155]

Now, I only have a small amount of time, and I'm going to capture a few bits and pieces, but let me say, at the risk of incurring the wrath of the member and my colleague who put this motion forward, that the motion in itself is not sufficient. It asks us to discuss and debate a plan. I think that time is over. We have to actually start taking some concerted action.

As we've seen with the wild-stock collapse, we need to take action. As we've seen with the market shift that's occurring just now, British Columbia is losing ground. When one of our biggest buyers of farmed salmon says that they're going south to closed containment to purchase, we have lost ground.

Now, the members on the opposite side say that back in the '90s.... We stand here, and we say, you know, the

best fish management, bar none — all of the politics of division. All of the politics of division do nothing to deal with the issue of the wild salmon stock collapse and to deal with the issue of having to move our industry to be truly world leaders in the new sustainable farmed fish, which will be closed containment — period.

We have lost that opportunity because of the kinds of arguments we've gotten from this government that somehow we don't have to act, that government actually does not have a leadership role in society. Well, I totally and completely disagree with that point of view.

In this case, it is up to government to lead, and the government had a plan put in front of them by a committee that the Premier struck, a committee that the Premier sanctioned, a committee that came forward after due deliberation and put forward a plan to move us to closed containment. How much further ahead would we have been if we had actually acted on that? Maybe the Pattison Group would have been buying from B.C. closed-containment systems and not down in the United States.

To my friends the Steelworkers.... We have had those discussions with Steelworkers. We have let them know that the only way to preserve the jobs that they have now and to grow their jobs in the future is to move the industry to closed containment.

Are there difficulties? Are there technological challenges? You bet. But the complexity that we have of preserving wild salmon stock must cause us to apply the precautionary principle. If we think there's the possibility that one of our industrial activities is simply adding the final insult to wild stock, then we have an obligation, for present and future generations, to get on with the job and to move this industry and transition it to where it needs to go.

B. Simpson moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

**Hon. I. Chong:** I thank all members for their statements this morning.

Hon. I. Chong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, this House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 11:59 a.m.

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