



Fifth Session, 40th Parliament

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

Monday, February 22, 2016
Morning Sitting
Volume 33, Number 1

THE HONOURABLE LINDA REID, SPEAKER

ISSN 0709-1281 (Print)
ISSN 1499-2175 (Online)

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

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
Her Honour the Honourable Judith Guichon, OBC

FIFTH SESSION, 40TH PARLIAMENT

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
Honourable Linda Reid

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Premier and President of the Executive Council	Hon. Christy Clark
Deputy Premier and Minister of Natural Gas Development and Minister Responsible for Housing	Hon. Rich Coleman
Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation	Hon. John Rustad
Minister of Advanced Education.....	Hon. Andrew Wilkinson
Minister of Agriculture.....	Hon. Norm Letnick
Minister of Children and Family Development	Hon. Stephanie Cadieux
Minister of Community, Sport and Cultural Development and Minister Responsible for TransLink.....	Hon. Peter Fassbender
Minister of Education	Hon. Mike Bernier
Minister of Energy and Mines and Minister Responsible for Core Review	Hon. Bill Bennett
Minister of Environment.....	Hon. Mary Polak
Minister of Finance	Hon. Michael de Jong, QC
Minister of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations.....	Hon. Steve Thomson
Minister of Health	Hon. Dr. Terry Lake
Minister of International Trade and Minister Responsible for Asia Pacific Strategy and Multiculturalism	Hon. Teresa Wat
Minister of Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training and Minister Responsible for Labour.....	Hon. Shirley Bond
Minister of Justice.....	Hon. Suzanne Anton
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General.....	Hon. Mike Morris
Minister of Small Business and Red Tape Reduction and Minister Responsible for the Liquor Distribution Branch.....	Hon. Coralee Oakes
Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation.....	Hon. Michelle Stilwell
Minister of Technology, Innovation and Citizens' Services.....	Hon. Amrik Virk
Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure.....	Hon. Todd Stone
Minister of State for Emergency Preparedness	Hon. Naomi Yamamoto

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Leader of the Official Opposition.....	John Horgan
Deputy Speaker.....	Richard T. Lee
Assistant Deputy Speaker	Raj Chouhan
Deputy Chair, Committee of the Whole	Pat Pimm
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly	Craig James
Deputy Clerk and Clerk of Committees.....	Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Sessional Law Clerk	Roderick MacArthur, QC
Sergeant-at-Arms	Gary Lenz

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS

Anton, Hon. Suzanne (BC Liberal) Vancouver-Fraserview
 Ashton, Dan (BC Liberal) Penticton
 Austin, Robin (NDP) Skeena
 Bains, Harry (NDP) Surrey-Newton
 Barnett, Donna (BC Liberal) Cariboo-Chilcotin
 Bennett, Hon. Bill (BC Liberal) Kootenay East
 Bernier, Hon. Mike (BC Liberal) Peace River South
 Bing, Dr. Doug (BC Liberal) Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows
 Bond, Hon. Shirley (BC Liberal) Prince George-Valemount
 Cadieux, Hon. Stephanie (BC Liberal) Surrey-Cloverdale
 Chandra Herbert, Spencer (NDP) Vancouver-West End
 Chouhan, Raj (NDP) Burnaby-Edmonds
 Clark, Hon. Christy (BC Liberal) Westside-Kelowna
 Coleman, Hon. Rich (BC Liberal) Fort Langley-Aldergrove
 Conroy, Katrine (NDP) Kootenay West
 Corrigan, Kathy (NDP) Burnaby-Deer Lake
 Dalton, Marc (BC Liberal) Maple Ridge-Mission
 Darcy, Judy (NDP) New Westminster
 de Jong, Hon. Michael, QC (BC Liberal) Abbotsford West
 Dix, Adrian (NDP) Vancouver-Kingsway
 Donaldson, Doug (NDP) Stikine
 Eby, David (NDP) Vancouver-Point Grey
 Elmore, Mable (NDP) Vancouver-Kensington
 Farnworth, Mike (NDP) Port Coquitlam
 Fassbender, Hon. Peter (BC Liberal) Surrey-Fleetwood
 Fleming, Rob (NDP) Victoria-Swan Lake
 Foster, Eric (BC Liberal) Vernon-Monashee
 Fraser, Scott (NDP) Alberni-Pacific Rim
 Gibson, Simon (BC Liberal) Abbotsford-Mission
 Hamilton, Wm. Scott (BC Liberal) Delta North
 Hammell, Sue (NDP) Surrey-Green Timbers
 Heyman, George (NDP) Vancouver-Fairview
 Hogg, Gordon (BC Liberal) Surrey-White Rock
 Holman, Gary (NDP) Saanich North and the Islands
 Horgan, John (NDP) Juan de Fuca
 Hunt, Marvin (BC Liberal) Surrey-Panorama
 Huntington, Vicki (Ind.) Delta South
 James, Carole (NDP) Victoria-Beacon Hill
 Karagianis, Maurine (NDP) Esquimalt-Royal Roads
 Krog, Leonard Eugene (NDP) Nanaimo
 Kylo, Greg (BC Liberal) Shuswap
 Lake, Hon. Dr. Terry (BC Liberal) Kamloops-North Thompson
 Larson, Linda (BC Liberal) Boundary-Similkameen
 Lee, Richard T. (BC Liberal) Burnaby North
 Letnick, Hon. Norm (BC Liberal) Kelowna-Lake Country
 Macdonald, Norm (NDP) Columbia River-Revelstoke
 McRae, Don (BC Liberal) Comox Valley
 Mark, Melanie (NDP) Vancouver-Mount Pleasant
 Martin, John (BC Liberal) Chilliwack
 Morris, Hon. Mike (BC Liberal) Prince George-Mackenzie
 Mungall, Michelle (NDP) Nelson-Creston
 Oakes, Hon. Coralee (BC Liberal) Cariboo North
 Pimm, Pat (BC Liberal) Peace River North
 Plecas, Dr. Darryl (BC Liberal) Abbotsford South
 Polak, Hon. Mary (BC Liberal) Langley
 Popham, Lana (NDP) Saanich South
 Ralston, Bruce (NDP) Surrey-Whalley
 Reid, Hon. Linda (BC Liberal) Richmond East
 Reimer, Linda (BC Liberal) Port Moody-Coquitlam
 Rice, Jennifer (NDP) North Coast
 Robinson, Selina (NDP) Coquitlam-Maillardville
 Routley, Bill (NDP) Cowichan Valley
 Routley, Doug (NDP) Nanaimo-North Cowichan
 Rustad, Hon. John (BC Liberal) Nechako Lakes
 Shin, Jane Jae Kyung (NDP) Burnaby-Lougheed
 Simons, Nicholas (NDP) Powell River-Sunshine Coast
 Simpson, Shane (NDP) Vancouver-Hastings
 Stilwell, Hon. Michelle (BC Liberal) Parksville-Qualicum
 Stilwell, Dr. Moira (BC Liberal) Vancouver-Langara
 Stone, Hon. Todd (BC Liberal) Kamloops-South Thompson
 Sturdy, Jordan (BC Liberal) West Vancouver-Sea to Sky
 Sullivan, Sam (BC Liberal) Vancouver-False Creek
 Sultan, Ralph (BC Liberal) West Vancouver-Capilano
 Tegart, Jackie (BC Liberal) Fraser-Nicola
 Thomson, Hon. Steve (BC Liberal) Kelowna-Mission
 Thornthwaite, Jane (BC Liberal) North Vancouver-Seymour
 Throness, Laurie (BC Liberal) Chilliwack-Hope
 Trevena, Claire (NDP) North Island
 Virk, Hon. Amrik (BC Liberal) Surrey-Tynehead
 Wat, Hon. Teresa (BC Liberal) Richmond Centre
 Weaver, Dr. Andrew (Ind.) Oak Bay-Gordon Head
 Wickens, Jodie (NDP) Coquitlam-Burke Mountain
 Wilkinson, Hon. Andrew (BC Liberal) Vancouver-Quilchena
 Yamamoto, Hon. Naomi (BC Liberal) North Vancouver-Lonsdale
 Yap, John (BC Liberal) Richmond-Steveston

LIST OF MEMBERS BY RIDING

Abbotsford-Mission Simon Gibson
 Abbotsford South Dr. Darryl Plecas
 Abbotsford West Hon. Michael de Jong, QC
 Alberni-Pacific Rim Scott Fraser
 Boundary-Similkameen Linda Larson
 Burnaby-Deer Lake Kathy Corrigan
 Burnaby-Edmonds Raj Chouhan
 Burnaby-Lougheed Jane Jae Kyung Shin
 Burnaby North Richard T. Lee
 Cariboo-Chilcotin Donna Barnett
 Cariboo North Hon. Coralee Oakes
 Chilliwack John Martin
 Chilliwack-Hope Laurie Throness
 Columbia River-Revelstoke Norm Macdonald
 Comox Valley Don McRae
 Coquitlam-Burke Mountain Jodie Wickens
 Coquitlam-Maillardville Selina Robinson
 Cowichan Valley Bill Routley
 Delta North Wm. Scott Hamilton
 Delta South Vicki Huntington
 Esquimalt-Royal Roads Maurine Karagianis
 Fort Langley-Aldergrove Hon. Rich Coleman
 Fraser-Nicola Jackie Tegart
 Juan de Fuca John Horgan
 Kamloops-North Thompson Hon. Dr. Terry Lake
 Kamloops-South Thompson Hon. Todd Stone
 Kelowna-Lake Country Hon. Norm Letnick
 Kelowna-Mission Hon. Steve Thomson
 Kootenay East Hon. Bill Bennett
 Kootenay West Katrine Conroy
 Langley Hon. Mary Polak
 Maple Ridge-Mission Marc Dalton
 Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows Dr. Doug Bing
 Nanaimo Leonard Eugene Krog
 Nanaimo-North Cowichan Doug Routley
 Nechako Lakes Hon. John Rustad
 Nelson-Creston Michelle Mungall
 New Westminster Judy Darcy
 North Coast Jennifer Rice
 North Island Claire Trevena
 North Vancouver-Lonsdale Hon. Naomi Yamamoto
 North Vancouver-Seymour Jane Thornthwaite
 Oak Bay-Gordon Head Dr. Andrew Weaver
 Parksville-Qualicum Hon. Michelle Stilwell
 Peace River North Pat Pimm
 Peace River South Hon. Mike Bernier
 Penticton Dan Ashton
 Port Coquitlam Mike Farnworth
 Port Moody-Coquitlam Linda Reimer
 Powell River-Sunshine Coast Nicholas Simons
 Prince George-Mackenzie Hon. Mike Morris
 Prince George-Valemount Hon. Shirley Bond
 Richmond Centre Hon. Teresa Wat
 Richmond East Hon. Linda Reid
 Richmond-Steveston John Yap
 Saanich North and the Islands Gary Holman
 Saanich South Lana Popham
 Shuswap Greg Kylo
 Skeena Robin Austin
 Stikine Doug Donaldson
 Surrey-Cloverdale Hon. Stephanie Cadieux
 Surrey-Fleetwood Hon. Peter Fassbender
 Surrey-Green Timbers Sue Hammell
 Surrey-Newton Harry Bains
 Surrey-Panorama Marvin Hunt
 Surrey-Tynehead Hon. Amrik Virk
 Surrey-Whalley Bruce Ralston
 Surrey-White Rock Gordon Hogg
 Vancouver-Fairview George Heyman
 Vancouver-False Creek Sam Sullivan
 Vancouver-Fraserview Hon. Suzanne Anton
 Vancouver-Hastings Shane Simpson
 Vancouver-Kensington Mable Elmore
 Vancouver-Kingsway Adrian Dix
 Vancouver-Langara Dr. Moira Stilwell
 Vancouver-Mount Pleasant Melanie Mark
 Vancouver-Point Grey David Eby
 Vancouver-Quilchena Hon. Andrew Wilkinson
 Vancouver-West End Spencer Chandra Herbert
 Vernon-Monashee Eric Foster
 Victoria-Beacon Hill Carole James
 Victoria-Swan Lake Rob Fleming
 West Vancouver-Capilano Ralph Sultan
 West Vancouver-Sea to Sky Jordan Sturdy
 Westside-Kelowna Hon. Christy Clark

CONTENTS

Monday, February 22, 2016
Morning Sitting

Page

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements.....	10539
Investing in the aerospace industry	
D. Plecas	
S. Simpson	
The way of the future	
G. Heyman	
J. Sturdy	
Resources versus resourcefulness: a changed economic track?	
R. Sultan	
B. Ralston	
Working for the best interests of children	
J. Rice	
D. Bing	
Private Members' Motions	10547
Motion 4 — Fiscal management and diverse economy	
D. Ashton	
C. James	
G. Kylo	
B. Ralston	
D. McRae	
G. Heyman	
L. Reimer	
M. Elmore	
L. Larson	
K. Conroy	
J. Martin	
L. Krog	

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2016

The House met at 10:01 a.m.

[Madame Speaker in the chair.]

Routine Business

Prayers.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements

INVESTING IN THE AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

D. Plecas: It's a pleasure today to rise in the House and speak about the aerospace industry on behalf of my constituents of Abbotsford South. This is an important industry not only for the people that I represent in Abbotsford South but for everyone across this province.

Aerospace is a booming industry and a key part of our diversified economy. Many people may not realize just how large the aerospace sector is in British Columbia. We actually have more than 160 aerospace aviation companies in the province, and many of those have world-class supply capabilities all over the globe.

[R. Lee in the chair.]

Collectively, they provide a hub of innovation, technical knowledge and manufacturing capability. And we in Abbotsford like to say that the Abbotsford International Airport is the centre of that hub. Indeed, there are a number of aerospace businesses that operate out of the airport.

But first let me talk about the booming place that is the Abbotsford International Airport. In terms of take-offs and landing, it is one of the ten busiest airports in Canada, and new flights are constantly being added. The airport is the second option to YVR and wants to provide cheaper options for our residents.

We've seen companies such as Air Canada expand their services. NewLeaf, the new travel company, recently announced that they would have new domestic flights out of the Abbotsford Airport. And of course, as you all know, we host the Abbotsford International Air Show. It is the largest air show in Canada, and I encourage all members to make a point of attending.

Also at the Abbotsford International Airport is Conair, the country's largest aerial firefighting company, operating a diverse fleet composed of water bombers and air tankers. They deliver a comprehensive range of aerial fire control products and services to a variety of international customers and partners. They have over 45 years of fire management experience and employ more than 250 skilled workers.

Current president and CEO Barry Marsden was one of the founding members of the company. I had the great pleasure of meeting him last Friday while visiting Conair for a number of company and government announcements.

It's really exciting to see all that's going on at Conair right now. The company is currently producing its fifth and sixth next-generation RJ85 air tankers. This is a four-engine jet aircraft converted in their facility in Abbotsford to a high-speed air tanker. These air tankers include a B.C.-developed retardant delivery system that is considered to be one of the most advanced in the world.

The next-generation RJ85 will supplement B.C.'s current fleet of air tankers on a pilot basis this summer for wildfire season. These planes are faster than the ones currently being used, and everyone is excited about the added efficiency and effectiveness they will bring to the job of fighting forest fires in B.C.

As well, Conair and the cutting-edge flight simulation and training company CAE announced that they had signed a memorandum of understanding to deliver a wildfire training and simulation centre in British Columbia. This simulation training program will be used to train RJ85 pilots in B.C.

Conair has established themselves as a world leader in the fire suppression industry, developing and supplying their world-class products and services to help communities right here at home and around the world. It is truly a great example of a B.C. company, with B.C. technology that is creating B.C. jobs.

The next company I want to mention is Chinook Helicopters. They began training operations at the Abbotsford Airport in 1982 and quickly became Canada's busiest and best-known helicopter training school. Chinook now dominates Canadian helicopter training; 25 percent of all helicopter training completed in Canada is done by Chinook.

In addition to that, last year 30 percent of students attending courses and programs at Chinook came from other countries. In fact, chances are that a large percentage of helicopter companies around the world have someone in their employ who has been through a Chinook helicopter training program.

Yet another Abbotsford Airport-centred company is Coastal Pacific Aviation, who also train pilots. In partnership with the University of the Fraser Valley, 12 instructors are training approximately 100 students, including pilots from China. They started operations in 1973 with one Cessna 172, and now they have a much-expanded fleet.

Then, too, at Abbotsford Airport, we have the giant Cascade Aerospace, a specialty aerospace and defence contractor and the Fraser Valley's largest private sector employer. We also have Marshall Aerospace and CP Advanced Flight.

I've highlighted these companies in my own riding. We are immensely proud of them. They are a huge benefit to

our economy and provide services and products in B.C. and around the world.

S. Simpson: I'm pleased to get an opportunity to engage in this debate in regard to the aerospace industry in British Columbia.

As the member for Abbotsford South says, it is a burgeoning industry. There are a number of businesses; it has about 160 or so. It's important for GDP. Probably most importantly, it creates a little more than 8,000 direct jobs — good jobs — and probably 14,000 to 18,000 or 19,000 indirect jobs. It's important as an employer too. That would make B.C.'s aerospace industry about the third-largest in the country, behind Quebec and Ontario.

The challenge here, as I see it, though, is that some of this industry has grown up over the past number of years in spite of the government. We know that there has been — and we've raised this issue in the House before — the challenge of a government that had preoccupied itself with LNG paying attention to other sectors that were, in fact, creating jobs day in and day out in British Columbia, like the aerospace industry.

[1010]

I think this is an industry that is a good example of where progress could have been made around a strategy for this sector — to bring it along and allow it to have even more progress. Let me talk a little bit about that and what I mean by that.

One of the challenges with the aerospace industry is that there are 160 companies, but they're mostly smaller companies. There are a couple of larger ones, but mostly they're smaller companies. If there's a challenge in this sector that you hear about, it is fragmentation. The industry is somewhat fragmented, and it becomes more important to find ways to consolidate that to allow the industry to move forward with a more focused and direct strategy. There hasn't been the attention paid there.

The result of that also is some failure in other areas. One example: in British Columbia, about 8 percent of the manufacturing output in aerospace goes into R and D, research and development. We know how important that is. That compares to Quebec, where 22 percent of the manufacturing output is in R and D, and Ontario, where it's about 19 percent.

So we're not investing in R and D in this province in our sector. That's very important if we want to be cutting edge, if we want to move forward — that we, in fact, have those investments in R and D. They're not happening here, and we need to be encouraging more research and development. That's an initiative the government should be getting behind in order to help accomplish that.

It's my belief, when I look at the skills-training initiatives in the province and the blueprint, that we aren't paying the attention we need to, to looking at the inventory of skill sets it will take to enhance this sector and making

sure we're training and have the trained people in place to be able to take advantage of that.

That becomes important because about 80 percent of the commercial airline business is replacing itself. It's just that it's aging, and over the next 20 years, that will happen. We know, and we are being told, that brand-new materials like carbon fibres, ceramics and advanced metallics are the new materials.

Those are not initiatives that the B.C. industry is dealing with. They need some support there too to be able to move their businesses forward and stay highly competitive around aerospace.

It's time for a B.C. strategy. This is where the government has to step up — working with the sector, working with academics, working with government — and pull together that sector to make sure that we're not only doing well, as we are today in aerospace, but that we truly are cutting edge moving forward and that we have a strategy that allows a consolidation, allows us to move forward, allows those 8,000 jobs to grow substantially in the future and makes sure that this industry does, in fact, stay competitive and become more cutting edge.

That will happen with some leadership from government working in collaboration with the sector. I don't believe that that leadership has, to this date, been provided. I would look forward to the government doing that so that we can make even more progress in aerospace as we move forward.

D. Plecas: I want to thank the member opposite for his comments.

I want to take some time, though, to speak about the aerospace industry in B.C. The B.C. aerospace sector generates \$1.3 billion in direct GDP. As the member opposite has already reminded us, it creates 8,000 workers throughout the province. In fact, as he also mentioned, we have the third-largest aerospace sector in the country alongside Quebec and Ontario.

We value our aerospace industry — yet another aspect of our diversified economy. It is why we have committed \$5 million over five years to develop and grow B.C.'s sector.

To do this, we have partnered with the Aerospace Industries Association of Canada, Pacific division. They will work to increase collaboration among aerospace partners, enhance technical capabilities of B.C. aerospace companies and develop a strategic approach to defence procurement, and ensure B.C. companies receive their fair share of federal programs and procurement.

Globally, there will be an increased demand for new aircraft. More than 38,000 new aircraft, valued at \$5.6 trillion, are expected to be needed over the next 20 years. Approximately 38 percent of the world's air traffic growth is expected to take place in the Asia-Pacific, where more than 100 million new passengers will enter the market annually.

[1015]

As Canada's Pacific gateway, B.C. is in a natural location for growth within the aerospace industry. B.C. is home to world-leading companies that offer world-class capabilities in niche areas. This includes such areas as rotary aircraft, special mission aircraft, support services and aviation training. We have companies all across the province that provide a variety of services and products, besides the ones I've already mentioned earlier that are located in Abbotsford. We also have the well-known Viking aircraft in Sidney, which builds the iconic Twin Otter 400 series aircraft which is being sold to customers in 15 countries around the world.

It's been a pleasure to talk about our aerospace industry and the many varied initiatives B.C. companies are taking to expand their services, not only in B.C. but around the world.

THE WAY OF THE FUTURE

G. Heyman: One of the success stories in B.C. is our clean-tech sector. One of the success stories around the world is the attention that's being paid to initiatives that will both reduce energy demand and replace fossil fuels with renewable alternatives. There's been even more excitement about the possibilities since the Paris conference and the agreement by the Canadian government to look even beyond a limit of 2 degrees warming, to aspire to 1.5.

It's in that spirit that we, on this side of the House, look very carefully at energy alternatives, both demand-side management and production in British Columbia. We talked to energy users, to energy economists, to people in the industry, and we put forward a program we that believe in strongly, called Power B.C.

We believe so strongly in the potential for Power B.C. that we have offered not to substitute our own judgment about what's best for British Columbia for the judgment of experts but to put our plan before the B.C. Utilities Commission. That's a commitment that we think honours British Columbians' desire for good, sound choices based in fact, not choices based on political expediency. We look forward to the day when we will put that plan before the B.C. Utilities Commission.

The clean-tech sector provides many opportunities for taxpayers, for ratepayers and for workers in every corner of this province. One of the first things that I believe and my colleagues believe should be concentrated on is the tremendous ability to save B.C. taxpayers — who pay more than \$400 million a year in energy costs in the public sector — by retrofitting public buildings.

Instead of requiring schools and hospitals to take money and buy carbon offsets in order to meet goals for which they're not provided resources — money that could be spent on retrofitting buildings, making them more energy-efficient, or by putting into public education or public health care — we would start by a massive public building retrofit and energy conservation program. It

will save money. It will reduce overall costs for energy. It will create apprentices, apprenticeships and well-paid jobs in every corner of British Columbia, in every town and community in this province.

Here's the bonus. For every dollar spent, even by conservative estimates, retrofits create twice as many jobs as dam construction. And when we know the tremendous demand and need for seismic upgrades in schools around British Columbia, we can combine the activity of energy conservation with seismic upgrading and achieve even greater efficiencies. The Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows school district estimates that simply by replacing aging light fixtures and ballasts, they could save more than \$280,000 every year.

We would then propose to move on to retrofit homes and businesses. We all know that the cheapest and greenest source of power is the power that we do not use. Retrofitting homes and businesses will continue to provide well-paid, steady jobs and careers for a lifetime, close to home for tradespeople around the province, literally in every community. A retrofit can cut energy bills by up to 25 percent in an average detached single-family home. [1020]

There are new standards being contemplated and, in fact, moved toward in cities like Vancouver — the standards called Passive House — that are tremendously energy-efficient. Not only is that useful for new construction, but a whole industry is taking place around insulation. Roxul insulation is produced and manufactured in British Columbia. High-energy-efficient windows — triple-paned, gas-filled — are also manufactured in British Columbia, for which there is a tremendous opportunity for export — manufacturing jobs, installation jobs.

Let me move on to the issue of clean tech. Whether it's wind, whether it's solar, whether it's battery storage, whether it's pumped storage, technology in clean energy is moving and evolving rapidly, and the price is dropping. All around the world, people are moving forward quickly with renewable energy technology.

The Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory report in October 2015 said that the price of U.S. solar has dropped a whopping 70 percent since 2009, and in the same month, the largest residential solar installer in the U.S. says its new module can produce 38 percent more power, in a module that costs less than existing technology.

Wind turbines are becoming more efficient. People are working on wind turbines that can work off very low-speed winds, so they can be sited in many more places in this province.

But in the last two weeks, the Canadian Wind Energy Association announced that with no prospect for a power call for their sector in British Columbia for at least a decade, they were closing up shop in British Columbia. It seems a shame that we are turning our back on the opportunities for jobs, on the opportunities for entrepreneurship, on the opportunity to let B.C. ratepayers and

taxpayers and workers benefit from rapidly evolving technology in renewable energy and the dropping prices that are associated with that evolving technology.

We believe that we can do much better. We believe that there are opportunities, not only to apply technologies developed in British Columbia here at home to save money but to create whole new and expanded export of products — whether it be windows, whether it be insulation, whether it be wind turbines, whether it be air-exchange units. We believe that we should foster well-paying jobs in engineering and trades, the jobs of the future. We look forward to the opportunity to do just that.

J. Sturdy: Thank you to the member opposite for the statement. Although, again, the way of the future was a little bit unclear, we are trusting that it was about renewable energy. I think that's a great story. In the fact that we only have five minutes to respond to it, I'll get going here.

This government certainly does believe in a balanced approach to securing a clean energy future. British Columbia has enormous energy potential, not the least of which are wind, solar, tidal, wave energy, geothermal potential, run-of-river potential and, of course, biomass.

A recent article was looking at Canada versus Europe in terms of how we're converting our electrical generation from fossil and nuclear sources to renewable ones. It was interesting to note.... Looking at France, for example, 20 percent of the energy produced in France is renewable, and their goal is to double that in 15 years. In Germany, they're on track to exceed 40 percent in five years — an even better story. Portugal produced more than 60 percent of their energy from renewables in terms of wind and hydro during the first quarter of 2014.

[1025]

Obviously the capacity factors create challenges there in terms of those actual numbers. This is something, I think, people do need to understand: what is a capacity factor? Having 1,000 megawatts of capacity doesn't give you 1,000 megawatts any time you want it. That's because it tends not to be firm, and I think we all understand why. That's why storage hydro and its essential big batteries provide such an opportunity for renewables.

So how are we doing a little closer to home? Well, Alberta is beginning to plan for a renewable future. Their ambition is to achieve a third of their generation energy through renewables in 15 years and then convert the remainder from coal to gas. So 70 percent to be gas-fired, 15 percent to be renewable in 15 years — and this is a laudable objective. But it does pale next to what's happened here British Columbia.

One of the significant milestones recently, in the last few years, is the Clean Energy Act — which was before my time in this Legislature, but I understand and have not been surprised to learn was opposed by members opposite — requires that at least 93 percent of British Columbia's energy is generated from clean or renewable sources.

As referred to by the member opposite, B.C. Hydro meets 66 percent of our new demand through conservation. He mentioned, actually, Passive House, which is an interesting technology. I actually, in Pemberton, have a Passive House factory right across the street from me in the Pemberton Industrial Park. This is a very successful operation built over the last couple of years.

This government is pleased to remind the House that last year 97.9 percent of all electricity generated in British Columbia was clean, green and renewable. This is a remarkable statistic. Clearly, we have achieved or surpassed our objective. The issue around the remaining 3 percent tends to be remote communities scattered around the province and some independent capacity issues. But there are solutions there, and we need to work on that with regard to getting those off-grid communities onto renewable energy.

Renewable energy. Public and private renewable energy generation are important to our low-carbon future and our stable grid. Boy, I can see that I only have a minute left here. There's just so much to talk about when it comes to renewables. We have worked with the Clean Energy Association and just recently signed an MOU between this government and B.C. Hydro, a memorandum of understanding to continue collaboration to deliver clean, reliable and affordable electricity to British Columbia and to continue to grow the renewable power sector.

The decision around Site C means that we'll have a reliable, firm energy, which is ideal to support the growth of the intermittent power and energy coming from sources such as wind and solar.

I just have so much more to talk about. But I'm just pleased to be part of a government that wants to grow a new green economy and support clean energy innovation. We need our future to be renewable.

G. Heyman: I thank the member for West Vancouver–Sea to Sky for his belief in renewable energy. I congratulate him and his constituents for the fact that Pemberton actually does play a leading role in developing technology used in Passive House construction and renovation.

But it's been a long time since the Clean Energy Act was passed in this Legislature. Much has changed, and much has changed in the world of technology.

The member for West Vancouver–Sea to Sky referred to Site C as being a source of reliable, firm power. It is, as is the power from other dams in British Columbia. But it's also true that there have been tremendous technological advances in marrying different kinds of renewable energy, in storing renewable energy, in grid technology, and the constraints that existed on renewable power even a decade ago are far less today than they were then.

The government likes to talk about diversifying the economy. But in fact, the decision to proceed with Site C, absent the oversight of the B.C. Utilities Commission, has

not only drawn criticism; it stifled the opportunities and the development, whether it's on conservation or whether it's on renewable energy throughout B.C.

[1030]

A simple move out of the five different levels of demand-side management proposed by B.C. Hydro to the mid-range, range 3, would save a tremendous amount of energy and create a huge number of jobs. Instead, because of the surplus of power we currently have, this government ordered B.C. Hydro to scale it back to level 2, a far lower level. We believe, on this side of the House, that we can do better.

Let me simply close with some comments that were made by people who are far more expert than I am. One of them is Marc Eliesen, the former CEO of B.C. Hydro, who said that a delay in Site C, rather than costing taxpayers and ratepayers money, would actually save money. He said a two-year delay would save \$519 million. Imagine the evolution of technology in that two-year period.

Eliesen's affidavit said Site C has not been subject to "an adequate level of due diligence," and he pointed out that the joint review panel concluded that B.C. Hydro had not demonstrated a need, and recommended that it be sent to the BCUC.

We have opportunities. We will not realize those opportunities unless we give ourselves the time to benefit from dropping price, advancing technology, instead of putting all of our eggs in one basket.

RESOURCES VERSUS RESOURCEFULNESS: A CHANGED ECONOMIC TRACK?

R. Sultan: Recently the world's top people booked into high-altitude hotels in the Swiss Alps to ponder the globe's economic prospects. A new economic strategy was suggested for Canada: previously we were known for our resources; now we would be known for our resourcefulness.

It is true that Canada's simple opportunities of the past, when, for example, gold nuggets could be picked up from the bottom of every creek in Barkerville, are harder and harder to find. The 21st century requires us to be more reliant on qualities of the mind.

But the world is complicated. If David Ricardo was still alive teaching the theory of comparative advantage, he would probably say Canada has no lock on resourceful people. Continents are awash with them. But Canada, unlike many others, has resources and the knowledge to profit from them. That comparative advantage has become the cornerstone of our prosperity. Resources and applied knowledge are the key.

B.C.'s natural gas industry depends upon our ability to find and deliver almost four billion cubic feet of gas a day through those pesky pipelines. Each full-sized LNG plant will require another three. Progress Energy has expended about \$10 billion to prove those vast quantities exist.

Did they jab a sharp stick in the ground and hope for the best? Our gas is actually locked up in shale formations three kilometres below the surface of the earth. We find those formations through 3D seismic, searching for deep shale structures with appropriate fractures, reservoir size and geomechanical properties. Big data derived from surface microseismic monitoring are subject to multi-variate statistical analysis by technical staff.

They are very good at what they do, and it takes a lot of them to do it. If British Columbia had the same relative numbers of engineers and geoscientists as Alberta, where this talent is headquartered, we would have to hire another 40,000 or so.

Next consider forestry. Many decades ago, my brother-in-law and I clamored up and down the steep slopes of Jervis Inlet, knocking down huge fir trees left and right. The demands were physical, not mental. That is not the forest industry of today. Today we use CT scanners and robotics in sawmills; lidar — light detection and ranging — and lasers in forest land management; drones, which take the measure and location of each and every tree over vast tracts of forest land; pulp mill refining for bioenergy and biochemicals; engineered wood products, such as particle board, OSB, Parallam, glulam and cross-laminated timber; and high-rise buildings made of wood.

[1035]

Genome B.C. is focused on the science of genome marker-aided selection to improve tree breeding and maintaining the health of our forests in response to climate change. Absent this science, it is not clear that our vast boreal forest will be there for our grandchildren.

Finally, consider mining. Fully autonomous trucks and drill rigs for surface mining — that is to say, unmanned — are beginning to catch up with the automated underground mining technology pioneered by my former employer, Atlas Copco of Sweden, and Caterpillar. Mining machines are guided by software, not human beings.

Boston Consulting Group says nobody has yet figured out how to make mining just like manufacturing, but that possibility is no longer out of reach. It's no big stretch to imagine mining operations themselves controlled from urban locations. Mining is moving closer to the urban technophile space.

Natural gas, forestry and mining are therefore on the forefront of technological innovation, science and engineering — knowledge applied to resources. That is what we are very good at. That is what we do around the world. We've come a long way from picking nuggets out of some little creek in Barkerville.

B. Ralston: It's always a pleasure to debate with the member for West Vancouver-Capilano. It brings a measure of knowledge and decorum to the House that I think is exemplary.

Certainly, the history of British Columbia has been characterized by the development of our resource in-

dustries, beginning with the very gold rushes that he mentions, in the Fraser River and Barkerville in the 19th century. The early efforts to harvest timber on the west coast — Martin Allerdale Grainger, in his book *Woodsmen of the West*, written in 1908, talks about the incredible plenty of trees that were simply at the waterline. What they did was simply get out of a small boat and cut the trees directly from the hillside and have them fall into the water.

The salmon-canning industry, the development of resources generally, whether it's the founding of the oil and gas industry in the '50s in the northeast of British Columbia.... Certainly, resources have formed and continue to play a major part in the B.C. economy. That is indeed one of the things that we are known for. The plenty and the riches of British Columbia, when shared by all the population, are truly a provincial and a national asset.

But I think what we've heard from the member for West Vancouver–Capilano is a more elegant variation of the riposte issued by the Minister of Mines, the member for Kootenay East, at the resources conference in Prince George in January.

The Prime Minister spoke at Davos, as the member has pointed out, and used that tag line. I think it's really no different from someone — perhaps slightly differently worded — talking about the virtues of a diversified economy, as we hear frequently now that the LNG dream seems to have sunk below the horizon, at least momentarily.

That's what the member has been sent here to do. The member for Kootenay East, notwithstanding that the provincial government is lobbying the new federal government for billions of dollars in infrastructure money and attempting to create a very close and harmonious relationship in order to facilitate those relationships — perhaps as a Harperite in mourning at the result of the last election — attacked the Prime Minister. He quickly climbed down. No doubt, there was a call from the Premier's office.

Here today we have a much more elegant and graceful version of the same refrain — which I agree with. It's refreshing to hear that put in a little bit more politically congenial manner, a little bit more savvy manner.

Certainly, resources are an important part of the B.C. economy. At the resources conference in Prince George and at other conferences, the application of technology to resources is paramount. In order to successfully, in a very tight global market, exploit resources, every effort is needed to make those industries as technologically leading as possible.

[1040]

It's a long way from shovels and picks, for sure, and British Columbia continues to draw much of its wealth from resource industries of the province.

R. Sultan: I thank the member for Surrey-Whalley for his, as usual, helpful remarks.

Our natural gas, forestry, mining and other resource-based activities add up to about 10 percent of the economy. If through some policy initiatives these sectors disappeared or became discouraged, the damage would be widespread.

The sharpest pain of all would be felt by government itself. This is because, in an average period, government earns more from the resource sector than do the owners of the resource companies themselves. This proposition is partly based on my hunch but also based on the results of a special study I commissioned as chair of the mining task force of this Legislature over a dozen years ago.

For 47 years, Pricewaterhouse has produced the annual B.C. mining survey that reviews the financial results, production and reserves of the top 40 mining companies measured by market capitalization in British Columbia. I asked PW if, on a pro bono basis, they would, first, add up all the taxes and royalties paid to governments by these 40 companies in the aggregate — royalties, corporate income taxes, withholding on behalf of employees, sales taxes, federal taxes, real estate taxes, etc., in the study period — and, second, add up all the payments to shareholders and parent companies in that same time period.

It turned out the dollars paid to government exceeded the dollars paid to shareholders by approximately one-third. I argued that government should, therefore, indemnify private resource companies from forfeiture to First Nations, since the present value to government typically exceeded the present value to shareholders. My ideas did not prosper, but the key point remains.

I believe government has a larger stake in the success of resource companies than do shareholders of resource companies themselves. Government should conduct itself accordingly.

WORKING FOR THE BEST INTERESTS OF CHILDREN

J. Rice: Although many of us in this Legislature make it part of our daily lives to work for the best interests of children, there is one independent advocate that makes it entirely her focus. That is the Representative for Children and Youth. The representative's office was established in 2007, based on the recommendations of the hon. Ted Hughes, after a horrific case where a child died in B.C. government care.

One of Hughes's recommendations was to create an independent officer of the Legislature to provide advocacy for children and oversight of the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

The representative's office conducts its responsibilities under the Representative for Children and Youth Act. The representative has clear statutory roles in reviewing and investigating critical injuries and deaths of children and youth; advocating for children, youth and young

adults who are receiving reviewable services; and monitoring programs and services for children and their families provided or funded by the government.

The first and, until the end of this year, the only Representative for Children and Youth that B.C. has ever known is Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. Under her tenure during the last nine years, the office has undertaken 15,000 advocacy files where her staff worked closely with MCFD staff to find resolutions.

As an independent officer of the Legislature, the representative reports to the bipartisan Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth as laid out in legislation. Ms. Turpel-Lafond has appeared before the standing committee 33 times, most recently in November, when she presented three reports and her office's annual report and service plan.

The reports are comprehensive, in-depth studies. They can be specific overviews on a topic, such as the 2013 report titled *Still Waiting: First-Hand Experiences with Youth Mental Health Services in B.C.*, or can be focused on a specific case, like the 2015 report titled *Paige's Story: Abuse, Indifference and a Young Life Discarded*. All reports contain recommendations, and many have been implemented, improving services and practices in MCFD and government.

[1045]

Paige's story is worth noting in this regard. Paige was a young First Nations woman who died at 19 of a drug overdose in a public washroom in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside, just 11 months after MCFD had severed ties with her because she had aged out of care. She was connected to the Ministry of Children and Family Development her whole life. She was subject to 30 child protection reports over the course of her life, and she moved 50 times between the ages of 16 and 18 while under the care of the ministry.

Despite the many incidents that Paige was involved in, the representative's office only received two reports about her: one before her death and one after. At the time of the public release of the report in May 2015, the representative said that this was the most difficult review that their office had ever conducted.

Although most of the recommendations in Paige's story are yet to be implemented by government, the widespread publicity generated by the report, along with other high-profile cases like the tragic death of 18-year-old Alex Gervais while in care, and the profiling of these incidents by the official opposition, no doubt played a significant role in the \$72 million increase to the ministry's budget for the coming fiscal year, as announced in last week's budget speech.

The budget increase was welcomed. But, as Ms. Turpel-Lafond pointed out, the increase will not fill a \$100 million hole that was carved out of previous MCFD budgets. Even with the increase, the ministry budget will still be less than it was 15 years ago.

Other times, reports by the representative have not been as successful in creating change in the government's approach. In her 2014 report titled, *Not Fully Invested: A Follow-Up Report on the Representative's Past Recommendations to Help Vulnerable Children in B.C.*, Ms. Turpel-Lafond highlighted four areas where key recommendations remain unaddressed by government. Those are children in situations of domestic violence, children and youth experiencing mental health challenges, child poverty and vulnerable aboriginal children and youth.

In the area of child poverty, the representative noted that B.C. still does not have a provincewide child poverty reduction plan, something she recommended in 2011. Of more recent note is the release of First Call's *B.C. Child Poverty Report Card*, in November, that revealed that one in five children in the province lives in poverty and also the fact that B.C. is the only province in Canada without a poverty reduction plan.

In the area of children and youth experiencing mental health challenges, the representative noted that none of her recommendations from 2013 has been implemented. In the fall, we learned of the case of Alex Malamalatabua, who died at 17 while in care. These recommendations could have made the world of difference to him.

Just this month, the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth tabled their comprehensive report on youth mental health services in B.C., identifying gaps and making concrete, urgent recommendations. Yet that service area in MCFD lost ground in this year's budget.

The work of the representative is, obviously, important and has made a difference. We need to express our collective support for the role of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth. With the tragedies revealed over the last year — Isabella Wiens, Paige, J.P., Alex Gervais, Carly Fraser, Alex Malamalatabua, Nick Lang — it seems apparent the representative's role is needed now as much as it was in 2007.

With that, I will take my seat and listen to the remarks from the government side.

D. Bing: It is a pleasure to rise and respond to the member for North Coast's statement on working for the best interests of children. We may disagree about a lot of things in this House, but the one thing all members agree on is that we all want the very best for the children of this province.

I am very pleased to say that this government is investing more to help children and families. Even during these challenging economic times, we are continuing to ensure vulnerable children and families in B.C. are receiving the critical front-line services they need.

[1050]

I want to begin by speaking about our commitment to the early years and how we are currently investing more than \$1 billion annually on early childhood services, in-

cluding services for children with special needs. We recently announced 21 new early-years centres to open in communities across the province. Early-years centres are tailored to meet the needs of each local community and allow parents with children ages zero to six to access services in convenient one-stop locations.

Services can include such things as child drop-in playgroup programs, StrongStart B.C. programs, public health clinics, advice and referrals, and parent education workshops. These new centres are in a diverse mix of urban, rural and aboriginal communities.

This brings the total up to 47 early-years centres in our province. I'm pleased to see that my own communities of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows will be benefiting from two of these early-years centres. Both communities will benefit from an early-years centre opening at the Katzie Cultural Education Society and at school district No. 42.

I would like to point out that a community in the northwest will also be benefiting from an early-years centre. In the remote town of Atlin, the Taku River Tlingit First Nation will be opening an early-years centre, bringing together services in one location and receiving an additional \$52,000 annually to operate this centre. This is a significant contribution for children and families and a clear example of how we are all working for the best interests of children.

Despite what the opposition would have you believe, the budget for this ministry has increased by over 38 per cent since 2004-2005, and that does not even include the increase from Budget 2016.

Front-line staff, such as social workers, perform a vital service for children and families in this province. We value their commitment, and to demonstrate that, we have beefed up our front line by adding more than 200 social workers to offices throughout this province. We made a commitment in November to hire more front-line staff, and we have kept that promise.

While the number of front-line social workers has increased, the number of children in care has decreased by 3,000 since 2001 to approximately 7,200 today. This is a 29 per cent decline. This is the lowest number in over 20 years.

Everyone deserves to have a place they know will always be home. We have invested \$2 million in additional funding to increase the number of children and youth being placed in forever homes. In 2014-15, the ministry placed 273 children and youth in care for adoption, a 21 per cent increase over the previous year.

I'm proud to tell my constituents that we are increasing the funding for children and families. We are investing \$217 million to support vulnerable youth and their families. We are putting in \$152 million to strengthen programs and services that provide for the welfare of children and youth, including child protection, children and youth in care, and family supports. There are \$11 million to support child care centres; \$51 million

for children and youth in care with special needs, as well as autism programs; and \$3 million over three years to support adoption service and to facilitate the adoption of children in care.

Clearly, we are working for the best interests of children, and these investments will make a huge difference for families in B.C.

J. Rice: I thank the member opposite for his comments.

The member opposite spoke about the fact that despite challenging economic times, we're still investing in children. Yet the government has been boasting about a surplus, has been boasting about being able to put \$100 million into a make-believe prosperity fund that is supposed to be from the revenue of LNG, which we have yet to see.

Let's be clear that we are still far behind. We are 15 years behind where we were. What I'm trying to say is that the budget was bigger 15 years ago for the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

As far as the investments he spoke about in investing in the northwest, I have to forcefully disagree that investments have been made in the northwest for children.

[1055]

Let's look at the example of the drinking water in schools in Prince Rupert. In the '80s and '90s, schools in the Lower Mainland and the southern parts of the province were tested for lead in the drinking water. Yet here we are, 2016, and the drinking water in the northwest — which has high acidic, low pH water which makes it more susceptible — has not been tested.

In fact, in 2012, they knew that they needed to test the water in Prince Rupert and other coastal communities. In 2014, the Ministry of Health's own staff published a report saying this is an urgent public health issue. They still did nothing until this year, when a dedicated public servant did the work herself.

It's unfortunate that a review commissioned by the Ministry of Children and Family Development released in December led to controversy that cast the role of the Representative for Children and Youth and actions of the representative in a negative light, since the author of that report, Bob Plecas, has, in his own words, engaged in "serious second thought" and now believes he was incorrect in recommending the quality assurance and oversight roles of the representative be removed and taken over by the ministry. The negative picture painted in public about the representative was forcefully condemned by the B.C. Indian Chiefs, the First Nations Summit, the Assembly of First Nations, the Stó:lō Tribal Council and the First Nations Health Council.

We all know the incredible work that the representative's office does working for the best interests of children. In my conclusion, it is why I believe a public statement by the Minister of Children and Family Development of her support for the representative, and a repudiation of any

negative light created by the report she commissioned, is the appropriate action for her to take at this point.

Hon. M. Polak: I call private member's Motion 4.

Private Members' Motions

MOTION 4 — FISCAL MANAGEMENT AND DIVERSE ECONOMY

D. Ashton: It's my pleasure today to rise on behalf of the constituents of Penticton, Summerland, Peachland and Naramata to introduce the following motion:

[Be it resolved that the province continues to be the strongest economy in Canada through sound fiscal management and creating more opportunities for British Columbians through a diversified economy.]

Deputy Speaker: Member.

Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 4 without disturbing the priority of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

D. Ashton: Thank you, hon. Speaker. I apologize for that.

British Columbians didn't become the poster child for good economic stewardship in Canada by some miracle. It's a result of having a steady, watchful eye. By looking after the pennies, the dollars will follow. It is a result of cultivating, promoting and creating an environment for a provincial economy that is highly diversified, an economy that is able to withstand the many variables and global market forces that are beyond our control.

With a diversified economy and diverse export markets, B.C. is protected from the downturns of any single economy. Indeed, the key to B.C.'s fiscal and financial success is our economy's diversification. We can't help but feel good about our four straight balanced budgets, which can happen when a government sticks to a plan combined with the hard work of the British Columbians it represents. Investments in areas such as health, education, social assistance and services would not be possible without a healthy and diverse economy, which B.C. has today.

I heard last week from the opposition that we do not do enough for people in need. Well, in my home riding, there are tangible new examples of our government's investment in people.

In Penticton, 70 units of subsidized rental housing and eight units for people with disabilities are being fast-tracked for construction. In Peachland, 66 units of subsidized rental housing are also being fast-tracked. These are results of our government and B.C. Housing working together with municipal governments in Penticton and Peachland. I'll say that again: working together by all levels of government.

Last, but certainly not least, within the next two months, I expect sod-turning to take place at the new patient tower at the Penticton Regional Hospital, a \$325 million project that will add 26,700 square metres of space. The patient tower will include an ambulatory care centre; surgical services centre; 84 medical surgical in-patient beds that are now single patient rooms; a new medical device reprocessing unit; and space for the UBC Faculty of Medicine program.

Elsewhere in the Okanagan and Thompson our government is spearheading the completion of the Vernon Jubilee Hospital Polson Tower, with \$22 million of a \$32 million project coming from the province of British Columbia.

[1100]

At Kelowna General Hospital, \$296 million of B.C. government financing is committed for the Interior Heart and Surgical Centre. At the Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops, we have committed \$47 million for a new \$80 million clinical services building, which will include out-patient services and teaching space for medical students.

Mention agriculture in this province, and many British Columbians' thoughts turn to the images of the incredible, fertile Okanagan Valley, with its marvellous cherries, wonderful apples and mouth-watering peaches. We are creating a new opportunity for growers, who now have a non-refundable farmers donation tax credit worth 25 percent of the fair market value of qualifying food donations. The tax credit encourages farmers to donate fresh food to charities such as food banks or to the school meal programs.

Food banks provide a vital service to British Columbia's families during times of need, and this is a way the province is able to support their very important work. Farmers who donate to food banks in British Columbia are also eligible for federal and provincial tax donation credits. Donations of food from individuals, through registered charities, are eligible for federal and provincial non-refundable charitable donation tax credits.

[R. Chouhan in the chair.]

Initiatives such as the farmers donation tax credit inspire innovative thinking, and it has a spinoff for the benefit of those who need our help the most. I am proud of what we have accomplished with and for British Columbians. Our four consecutive balanced budgets do make a positive difference. Along with our government's disciplined handling of the economy, the citizens of British Columbia will be and are much further ahead during these difficult times that many other provinces in Canada are feeling.

But we will not rest on our laurels. We know there is much work to be done. We will continue to be focused

and stick with our plan. We are determined to remain Canada's economic leader.

C. James: I'm pleased to rise and speak to the member's motion that talks about fiscal management and creating opportunities for British Columbians. I'm not sure what part of the province the member is spending time in. When he talks about citizens being further ahead, he's certainly not talking to the British Columbians that I and others talk to every single day, who, in fact, are struggling to get by and are having a difficult time managing paycheque to paycheque.

For the member to say that the government is creating opportunities for British Columbians.... I wish. I wish this was a budget that actually spoke to creating opportunities for British Columbians. I wish we had a chance for every British Columbian to benefit from British Columbia's economy, but that doesn't happen under this government. Just the opposite, in fact.

I want to use a couple of very specific examples. The first one is cuts to education, education in the broad sense. What could be more important in creating opportunity for people in this province than education? It is, in fact, the foundation of opportunity.

We start off with the kindergarten-to-grade-12 system that the government, in this budget, hasn't even put enough money in to manage the downloading of costs and the increased enrolment. That means, once again, we're going to see cuts to education. The government also says to school boards: "We think you have a lot of extra money lying around, so we're actually going to ask you to hand back some of the money that we give to you." Well, that's the complete opposite of providing opportunity.

What about adult basic education? People who've been in the workforce decide that they want to go back and better themselves. They want to get a job where they can earn more money to support their family. They're doing everything right. They decide they're going to take that upgrading of grade 12 math that they didn't need to graduate when they graduated but that now they need to get into an apprenticeship program, for example.

What does this government do? The government decides they'll charge them for it. That used to be free. They were able to do that because we recognized how important it is to give people a hand up — not a handout, but a hand up. And yet, this government decides: "No, we're going to start charging for adult basic education upgrading. And by the way, while we do that, we're also going to start charging for ESL business courses."

For people who want to learn the language of business, when it comes to English as a second language, they now have to pay as well. Again, closing the door to opportunity is what this government is doing.

Post-secondary education. We see that, three years in a row they've actually asked post-secondary education,

again, to give back money to the government, instead of recognizing the investment that that is in all of our future. Investing in education is a smart investment. It provides opportunity for people.

[1105]

Now, let's take a look at hard-working British Columbians. I heard the member say that citizens are further ahead. Well, not when they take a look at the fees and services this government has added on to them: a 77 percent increase in ferry fares, a 48 percent increase in ICBC rates, a 108 percent increase in medical services premiums, a 74 percent increase in hydro rates — you name it.

This government has nickelled-and-dimed families since they've come into play. For families, that doesn't make it easier to get ahead. It is not a surprise when you take a look at the increase in the use of payday loans in British Columbia, when you take a look at the statistics that show we have the highest per-capita debt in British Columbia. That's because families aren't getting by. That's because families are struggling.

I haven't even talked about the outrageous decision by government to say to people on disability: "By the way, we're giving you some money for disability every month, but we're taking your bus pass back, so now you'll have to pay for that. Never mind that we've given you a little, tiny bit; we're actually going to remove that money from you and take it back." That isn't providing people with opportunity. That's doing just the opposite.

Diversification of the economy. Well, I'm glad the government finally learned the word "diversification" after we've seen a Premier who has done nothing but talk about LNG and drive LNG and forget about all the other industries that, thankfully, despite the government, are continuing on, like tourism, high tech, arts and culture, and forestry. They're barely hanging on, not able to get attention from this government, not able to see the kind of time and support they deserve, because this Premier, with blinders on, decided that LNG was the only thing that she was going to pay attention to.

I am a proud British Columbian. I want our economy to do well. I want the people of our province to do well. But that's not what we saw in the budget that came forward.

G. Kylo: On behalf of my constituents of Shuswap, I'm pleased to add my voice to the motion put forward by my friend and colleague from Penticton: "Be it resolved that the province continues to be the strongest economy in Canada through sound fiscal management and creating more opportunities for British Columbians through a diversified economy."

The B.C. jobs plan truly shows the diversification, our focus on a lot more than just one specific industry sector. We're talking natural gas development, forestry, mining, tourism, technology, transportation, international education. All of those different sectors are a key focus of the B.C. jobs plan, and we are providing the diversification

and the focus in this province to ensure that B.C.'s economy continues to grow.

I never get tired of saying that we have released four consecutive balanced budgets. This is a feat that would seem next to impossible when you consider the economic roller-coaster the world has been on over the past few years and continues to be to this day. But we have persevered. We have looked at our strengths and built on those. We have developed new markets for our goods, and we have bolstered our presence in existing ones.

Diversification and fiscal responsibility have been the keys to British Columbia's economic success story. When we look at diversification of our markets, we have focused on growing trade ties with Asia. We've reduced our reliance on the U.S. economy. Back in 2001, 74 percent of our trade was with the United States; this past year, only 52 percent. We are continuing to diversify our economy and our focus on markets around the globe.

We believe balancing the budget is a matter of fundamental respect for the taxpayer. We do not want to spend more in a year than we take in. We believe the province should strive for a strong credit rating.

Since 2001, our fiscal responsibility has led to seven consecutive credit upgrades, securing our province with the highest possible bond ratings and saving B.C. taxpayers tens of millions of dollars each year that would otherwise go to paying higher interest costs. Because of our prudent fiscal management, we have earned a triple-A credit rating.

Achieving and maintaining a triple-A credit rating has paid off by keeping our debt-servicing costs low. Ontario, with its lower credit rating, pays debt-servicing costs of about 9.1 percent of revenues, compared to only 4 percent in British Columbia. If B.C. was to have the same credit rating and rating agency as the province of Ontario, we'd spend an additional \$2.4 billion a year in debt-servicing costs, \$2.4 billion a year that would actually go towards covering interest rather than being invested into core services of government.

[1110]

The surpluses that are forecast each year in our fiscal plan help to pay taxpayer-supported debt, making it affordable. We're using the surpluses from the balanced budget to pay down our debt. By 2017-18, our government's direct operating debt will be at its lowest levels since 1985-86, and at the current rate, it'll be completely eliminated by 2019-20. The last time B.C. had no direct operating debt was back in 1975-76.

Government's taxpayer-supported debt-to-GDP ratio, a key measure of affordability, improves in each year of the fiscal plan, with a current forecast of 17.2 percent in 2015-16. Total taxpayer-supported debt will rise by \$3.7 billion between 2014 and 2018, as operating surpluses and balance sheet management help offset taxpayer-supported capital spending. Moneys borrowed pay for capital projects, like construction of hospitals, schools, transportation and infrastructure. We are currently bor-

rowing to build. Our balanced budget ensures we are not borrowing to pay for the province's operations.

The Minister of Finance is establishing a commission to examine whether the province's current tax regime is best suited to enable business competitiveness and encourage investment in our economy. The commission will be tasked with making recommendations that position B.C.'s tax structure to meet the economic realities of the future while respecting the outcome of the 2011 referendum to eliminate the harmonized sales tax.

Our ability to do business across distances and time zones has transformed the provincial, national and global economies. B.C.'s economy is also evolving as a result of changing demographics, advances in technology and the growing importance of the service sector. Given these changes, B.C. may require a new approach to taxation, one that effectively promotes productivity, investment and growth in a modern economy.

The scope of the work will explicitly exclude a return to the HST. The commission's work will include opportunities for British Columbians to share their views and propose changes for consideration. Indeed, including British Columbians in our decision-making is another hallmark of our governance. We're all equal partners — one voice, one economic juggernaut that is the envy of Canada. We have come far; we'll go further.

B. Ralston: Ordinarily, private members' time is a time for private members — that is, non-members of cabinet — to bring forward issues that might not get any discussion or an appropriate amount of discussion. This, though, seems to be really a version of budget debate in an abbreviated form, which is, I think, probably not the best use of this time of the Legislature.

Nonetheless, I know the member for Penticton has raised this issue as a private member's statement. Last week or the week before, same wording again before the House. I think budget debate is probably the procedurally appropriate place to have this discussion.

Nonetheless, let's have a look at what has been said. The assertion is made by the other side that British Columbia's economy is highly diversified, which is accurate, but they claim credit for that despite the fact that the Premier, since 2011 and her taking office as the Premier of the province, has said publicly that she was "focused like a laser" on the LNG industry.

All the resources of government were channelled towards developing an LNG industry. That meant that other sectors of the economy — whether forestry, high tech, manufacturing; their industry representatives, representatives of labour who represented people in those industries — found it very difficult to get the time of day from the Premier's office and from individual ministers, because of "focused like a laser" on LNG.

Well, contrary to the B.C. Liberals saying that they do understand resource industries, they seem to have forgot-

ten that resource industry prices are notoriously cyclical. The price of oil went down to eight bucks a barrel in 1988, and half the Calgary Stock Exchange shut down.

[1115]

This is not news. This is how resource industries in the global market perform. This repeated assertion by the scripts from the public affairs department, to the 250 people that work for the MLAs on the other side of the Legislature, to create this illusion that somehow this government is responsible for the diversified economy is really laughable. But it seems to be the consistent rhetorical effort that we've heard in this mini-budget debate this morning and we continue to hear in budget debate on other occasions.

Realistically, British Columbia has a population of 4.7 million in an open economy. It's subject to world markets. It does have certain strengths — there's no doubt about that — and it does have certain weaknesses. The strengths, I would say at the moment — according to Jock Finlayson, B.C. Business Council economist — are a federal government economic stimulus, perhaps much derided by the former Harperites on the other side, and that's the majority of the B.C. Liberal MLAs; moderate U.S. economic growth; some gains in Canadian non-energy exports; and a continued low interest rate and low dollar. None of these are factors that are created by government action on the other side.

Now, certainly, there are challenges — the member for Victoria-Beacon Hill has alluded to those — for ordinary people — not simply the bond rating agencies but ordinary people: the people that live in my riding in Surrey-Whalley; the people that live in her riding; and, doubtlessly, people that live in the member's constituency of Penticton.

People are having a hard time. This is not news. But this government, in its efforts to paint themselves in these unrealistic tones, seem to have forgotten about that. That is the object of government. That is who the economy should serve. It shouldn't serve the top 2 percent, the millionaires that this government gave a tax break to and in over four years will give them back a billion dollars.

That's not the object of our efforts here. Our effort is to make life better for all British Columbians, and that, unfortunately, is not what is happening given the direction that the Premier and her B.C. Liberal colleagues on the other side are engaging in.

D. McRae: I'm pleased to rise in the House and speak in support of the motion brought forward by the member for Penticton: "Be it resolved that the province continues to be the strongest economy in Canada through sound fiscal management and creating more opportunities for British Columbians through a diversified economy."

If you look at the history of British Columbia, you see how we've evolved over decades. If we were my father's generation, if it was in the 1970s, we'd see the depend-

ence of British Columbia on one market — on the United States. A great market it is and has been for our country and will continue to be so. But it was nice to see that leaders of this province, both in politics, in government, and in industry, looked beyond the United States for opportunities that could exist. You look to see where we've made the efforts — obviously, China, India, Taiwan, Japan. It's not just one country. I know in the '80s and into the '90s, obviously, a lot of focus went into Japan, but in the 2000s, we see this government take a lot of interest in the opportunities to see how we can work with China.

If you talk to successive Ministers of Forests, they will talk about how we go from a very small export market with China about 12 years ago to over \$1 billion a year being sent from this province into China today. Why? Because we made those efforts; we made those relationships. It was government working with industry to keep men and women and communities in rural B.C. and in urban British Columbia employed. It is absolutely essential to do that.

As well, we haven't just concentrated on some of those traditional industries. Look at the LNG industry. I know the members opposite often have concerns about it. But I guarantee you this: if we were not working on the LNG business, they'd be the first to stand up and criticize us for not supporting it.

To date, about \$20 billion has been invested in the province of British Columbia in companies that are interested in exploring the LNG opportunity. What they asked us to do was: "Will you set the table for us to make our decision." Like many people's commentary, we can't control world markets, but we can make sure that we are going to be a jurisdiction that won't get in the way of perhaps an amazing opportunity in this province.

I remember a year and a half ago, I happened to be in Terrace. I got off the airplane in Terrace, and it was kind of a dreary day in the middle of wintertime. I've been there several times through various ministries and this job as an MLA. I look over, and I see 20 helicopters on the Terrace airport apron. What are they doing there? They're working in the oil and gas industry and the mining industry. Those helicopters charge out at \$300 to \$900 an hour when they're there. They all have employees. They all have maintenance individuals. That's just one small impact that an industry will have in a community which needs those economic supports. Terrace has obviously seen a great impact by the potential for LNG in this province.

[1120]

As well, in this chamber, all members will know that I'll stand up and have a great interest in agriculture. Look at our greatest agricultural export for this province. It's seafood. Whether it is fish, like a hake or a halibut, a wild salmon or a farmed salmon, or shellfish, which comes from my community, it has become B.C.'s largest agricultural export, by all means.

A huge percentage of our product goes down to the United States, with their country's 300-million population. But as well, look at the opportunities we have. You go to China — geoduck. You know, 30 years ago geoduck was not even on the average B.C. resident's radar screen. Now we send literally hundreds and thousands of pounds into China every year — an insatiable demand and a unique opportunity for our product.

I happened to be in a constituency last week. I had some pork producers come to visit me, and they were concerned that the abattoirs are so busy right now that they need to see if we can help them, to allow them to get more of their product to market. Why? Because over the last several years, there has been an incredible growth, whether it is the cattle industry or chicken or pork. The abattoirs, which require a substantial investment — investment which they're doing — just need some assistance, getting forward, to allow these smaller producers to get their product to market.

Vancouver Island. You look just in Vancouver Island, at Victoria, today. You look over to the Empress — a substantial investment by a private sector employer. Why? They have faith in tourism on Vancouver Island. Look across the street to the Grand hotel. They're doing the same thing. Whether it's Butchart Gardens or, in my community, Mount Washington, people realize that a diversified economy isn't just the resource sector; it's also these other sectors, like tourism. Vancouver Island is so very well positioned to take advantage — not just in the past, not just today, but going forward. We have a great product, a safe product, one that the world wants to see.

I happened to be at the Truck Loggers Association event in January, and it was so nice to see the truck loggers saying, "You know what? Two or three years ago we were challenged to find employees. We were challenged to find work," and what's happening now? Well, they have tons of work going forward. Always challenges — but they're doing well because we have a diversified economy in this country, in this province.

G. Heyman: It gives me great pleasure to rise to speak to this motion, although I wish I had more confidence that the claims made by members opposite actually had anything to do with an overarching strategy to develop the economy and build jobs in British Columbia. I'm pleased to see, and I'm going to focus my remarks on, the comments about diversifying B.C.'s economy, particularly the tech sector.

As we know, and as many people in this House have said over and over, the tech sector employs more than 86,000 people. Those are more employees than in mining, oil and gas, and forestry put together. It contributes more than \$13 billion to the provincial GDP, and the average wage is about 66 percent higher in that sector than the B.C. average.

So let us imagine how well this sector might be doing with even a little bit more attention from the govern-

ment of British Columbia. Think how many more jobs could have been created. Instead, we have a Premier who has recently discovered the words "technology" and "diversified economy," made a couple of token gestures and failed, in this budget, to put anything in place to support her empty words and the gestures that she purports to have made.

I was at a summit over a year ago when the Premier said, in front of the assembled media, that there is not a single policy decision made by her government that isn't seen through the lens of what this policy will do to build an LNG industry in British Columbia. We still don't have an LNG industry in British Columbia, but what we do have is a world audience of investors who heard very clearly what the priority of this government was, and it wasn't diversification, and it wasn't building the tech sector.

At the B.C. Tech Summit, the Premier spoke. She referenced, once again, a \$100 million venture capital investment fund and a commitment that every student in British Columbia would get, on a mandatory basis, education in coding.

[1125]

She was shortly corrected by the Education Ministry, which said it wouldn't be mandatory; it would be voluntary. But we waited eagerly to see in the budget, whether there would be anything, anything at all, for the education system to support this offer. There was zero. There was nothing.

In addition, there was no action, yet again, on the eligible business tax credit — either raising the ceiling for individual investors or raising the overall company cap.

These are the kinds of simple but important measures that will create jobs for British Columbians, that will send a signal to the world from government that we have skin in the game on the tech sector. We want it to grow, and we're willing to put our money where our mouth is.

Instead, we have no improvement in research-and-development funding — no commitment and no plan to enhance it. We have no plan to address the gaps in post-secondary education that sees us far behind the Canadian average in engineering graduates, in math graduates and in other important fields that are important to provide talent to the tech sector.

Some months ago in this House, the member for Delta North selectively quoted Ryan Holmes, the founder and CEO of Hootsuite, because he thought the quote, which was out of context, made the NDP federally — and, by extension, members on this side of the House — look bad.

But I have heard nobody on the other side of the House quote Ryan Holmes when he said that one of the biggest disincentives to attracting and retaining important tech talent in British Columbia is the stratospheric, out-of-control cost of housing in the Lower Mainland, which this government still refuses to do anything meaningful to address.

When people in the sector say they need help, what they get is empty words from this government and hollow promises from members opposite who try to wrap themselves in the success of what others have done without any attention or support from this government. That's not good enough. On this side of the House, we have a vision — a vision that we intend to support — to build a real diversified economy in British Columbia.

L. Reimer: There's a very good reason why British Columbia is the strongest economy in Canada. The answer is twofold. First, we do indeed have a diversified economy, and this was no accident. This was very intentional by this government. We fared fairly well after the recession of 2008 because we were diversified.

Second, through sound fiscal management, this government has produced four consecutive balanced budgets. We have all seen the ripple effects of the falling price of oil. British Columbia is not immune to these forces. It's dropping commodity prices around the world. Provinces like Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, and our closest neighbour, Alberta — all have seen their provincial economies devastated. Even British Columbia is not immune to abrupt changes in the global economy.

But there are reasons why B.C. is the only bright spot on the horizon. A low Canadian dollar is actually benefiting a highly diversified economy. For example, a low dollar has resulted in a boom in our tourism economy. British Columbia is a premier destination, and a low dollar is a tremendous advantage to more than 19,000 tourism-related businesses located throughout this province. To support this industry, the government invests more \$90 million annually, across every region, to make B.C. the best place to be.

A low Canadian dollar is also stimulating the B.C. film industry. Production spending by foreign production increased by more than 50 percent in 2015 to a record level of \$1.6 billion, and this is likely to continue. Foreign productions now make up about 80 percent of film industry spending in B.C. B.C.'s competitive advantages also include our pool of skilled labour, one-of-a-kind scenery and being located in the time zone as California. It also helps diversify our economy and bring good-paying jobs in the creative sector.

The second factor behind British Columbia's position as the strongest economy in Canada is our balanced budget. We're currently the only jurisdiction in Canada with a triple-A credit rating. British Columbia has earned and continues to enjoy the confidence of bond markets because we have a handle on our finances.

[1130]

According to the senior economist at the Bank of Montreal, "B.C. is on track to cruise into the year as the envy of the Canadian provinces. The budget is balanced, net debt is low and stabilizing, economic growth is at the top of the leaderboard, and the province's relative tax

competitiveness is steadily improving." But the reason why we balance the budget is not to please bond-rating agencies. Our purpose is to free up financial resources so that we can chart our own path and make life better for ordinary British Columbians.

A balanced budget means we can invest more money in health care, education, affordable housing, fighting climate change, to better engage First Nations and to make our streets safer. Most of all, the purpose of a balanced budget is to pay as we go and not accumulate a debt for our children and our grandchildren. These are the values of the government, and this is the reason why British Columbia continues to be the strongest economy in Canada.

M. Elmore: I am very pleased to rise and speak to the importance and need for a healthy and diverse economy that works for people.

I was quite surprised to hear claims from the previous member who just spoke, from Port Moody-Coquitlam, claiming that the B.C. Liberal government is responsible for the strength of B.C. and that actually they have initiated the diverse economy in British Columbia. I take exception to that.

I think British Columbians.... If we remember back, certainly, to claims by the Premier on needing to focus like a laser on the development of LNG through the election and, until quite recently, the focus of all efforts in the government on developing our liquefied natural gas industry — and we're still to see the establishment of one plant and a final investment decision going forward — that priority of this government has actually neglected our diverse economy.

When we look at not only the neglect of our economy and missing opportunities in terms of developing.... We heard, from my colleague from Vancouver-Fairview, of the potential that we have in high tech and the strategic importance of investing in high tech, as well as our many other sectors that have traditionally been very strong — tourism, mining, forestry, manufacturing. These are areas of our economy that require more priority from this government.

When we look, as well, at the record of fiscal management of the B.C. Liberals and review the decisions and priorities that this government is taking, we can see the values that are exposed. When we look at, on the one hand, establishing a prosperity fund.... That was supposed to have been funded by revenues from liquefied natural gas. We don't have one dollar coming in from this industry yet. In fact, the fund has been created by \$100 million coming from the pockets of British Columbians through increasing the medical service premiums.

That is really a contrast in terms of the words and priorities and values of the B.C. Liberal government and of not prioritizing the impacts and supporting hard-working British Columbians and families. That's the so-

called prosperity fund or, as I think it's been popularized, fantasy fund of the Premier.

As well, when we look at the contrast in terms of the priorities of the B.C. Liberal government, on the one hand, giving tax breaks to millionaires equalling a billion dollars over four years and, on the other hand, having British Columbian families paying more through B.C. Hydro increases, ferry fees, ICBC, medical service premiums and park fees, this exposes and really lays bare and speaks to the hardship that families in British Columbia and British Columbians are facing.

When we look, as well, at the lack of commitment towards housing affordability — and really expose that hardship that, particularly, families and folks in Metro Vancouver are facing — again, that's the record of this government.

I want to speak to jobs and opportunities, which should be the main focus, and the benefit that British Columbians should be seeing. We see a lack of oversight in the use of temporary foreign workers in our province. There is no record. Companies are not held to account. There is no oversight. We do not see any accountability from the B.C. Liberals in terms of providing some management or oversight for the use of temporary foreign workers in British Columbia.

[1135]

On top of that and compounding that challenge is the lack of enforcement of employment standards. We see that these workers coming into British Columbia are subjected to exploitation as a structural component of the program. The lack of enforcement of that leads to not only these workers being marginalized but also depresses the labour and working conditions for all workers in British Columbia.

We see that not only has this government failed to support a diversified economy; they're bringing increased hardship to British Columbians. There's really a restriction of opportunities for British Columbians wanting to seek good-paying jobs to support themselves and raise their families here in British Columbia. We see that not only do this budget and the priorities of the government fail to take into account supporting these industries, but there's a lack of opportunity for British Columbians.

L. Larson: I am pleased to rise and speak in support of the motion on B.C.'s strong, diverse economy. We all — as individuals, as a province and as a country — have been impacted by the instability of all markets worldwide. The prudent spending and fiscal management by this government over the past three and now a fourth year has not been easy, but that belt-tightening has enabled B.C. to survive the economic ups and downs and be in the best position to take advantage of any correction to the markets, particularly as it relates to exports from B.C.

An excellent example of the success of the work done in growing our markets relates to agriculture. In 2014,

the Minister of Agriculture led the B.C. delegation with B.C. cherry industry representatives on a federal trade mission to China that led to full, unimpeded access for fresh cherries into China.

As a direct result of that effort, the export value of fresh cherries has increased dramatically to 13,600 metric tonnes, a 56 percent increase, and a value of \$91.7 million, a 70 percent increase over the previous year. This is a direct result of the good working relationships between the B.C. cherry industry and the Pacific Rim countries that recently signed the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Cherries are not the only agricultural product that has seen growth due to our strong and stable economy. Seafood product exports have also grown. B.C. exported \$981 million worth of seafood products to 74 different markets in 2014, an increase of 10 percent over 2013. Ninety percent of B.C.'s total export value was generated by the top five markets: the United States, China, Japan, Hong Kong and Vietnam.

In 2014, B.C. seafood industry representatives, supported by B.C. government staff, attended four seafood trade shows in China. More than 3,400 British Columbians work directly in the primary seafood sector, providing economic development opportunities for our coastal communities, many of which are First Nations communities. More than 200 primary products and about 100 species of fish, shellfish and marine plants are produced in B.C.

The food-and-beverage-processing industry is comprised of more than 1,800 firms and is one of the largest manufacturing sectors in the province. In 2014, total sales included \$2.9 billion in agriculture, \$0.8 billion in seafood and \$8.5 billion in manufacturers' shipments. The food-and-beverage-manufacturing sector was up 7.2 percent, and primary agriculture was up 4.6 percent.

None of this is possible without a strong economy. Moving forward into 2016, the value of agriculture is supported by keeping a strong focus on programs like Buy B.C.

I have many growers in my riding who are also involved in supplying fresh fruit and vegetables into our school system under the B.C. Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation and look forward to continuing their participation in this valuable program. Now 1,400 First Nations and public schools benefit from that program. Offering some tax relief for farmers who generously donate food to our food banks will encourage more farmers to participate and get fresh B.C. fruit and vegetables to those who can benefit the most.

[1140]

Recognizing the value and success of the Agricultural Land Commission, a 33 percent base budget increase will help to better support the regional panel decision-making process, the planning work that the ALC pursues in partnering with local governments and the compliance and enforcement work that the ALC does across the province.

The plant and animal health branch will also receive funding to increase the capacity of the branch to deliver its mandate within the context of shifting responsibilities between the federal and provincial governments.

Agriculture, in all its forms, is alive and well in the Boundary-Similkameen and will continue to grow with the strong economy and fiscal management this government has demonstrated and continues to stand behind. I would like to conclude with a direct quote from Stan Vander Waal, chair of the B.C. Agriculture Council.

“Agriculture is a sustainable economic pillar, and it’s regarded by the United Nations as one of the most effective ways to reduce poverty and hunger, especially in rural communities. Investment in the resilience of B.C. agriculture is an investment in the health of British Columbians and the long-term success of our provincial economy.... A positive step in the right direction.”

K. Conroy: I agree with the member for Surrey-Whalley that this is actually more appropriate for a budget debate, but I had hoped that the motion this morning would be on innovation and research. That was actually, I think, a chance for members of both sides of the House to agree on something.

I want to commend the member for Vancouver-False Creek for raising that, but I also wanted to talk about the great research and innovation that was happening at Selkirk College, which is the oldest community college in the province and is actually celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. But now I have the opportunity to talk about how difficult it is for students in this province to access a post-secondary education because of the economic policies of this government.

Students are actually struggling to get their degrees — students who end up paying the highest debt in the country when they finally graduate, students who have an average debt of \$35,000. I was talking to one dedicated student who’s working full-time. She’s attending night classes three nights a week. She’s also doing an on-line course — all so she can finish her degree, not have a huge debt after the fact. She said she has no life, but she’s going to get her degree.

It’s a real struggle for students in this province, and they are hit with some of the highest interest rates, on their loans, in the country. It’s a stat you won’t hear from any of the members of government this morning when they’re talking about the economy of this province. These policies might be helping some folks in this province, but definitely not with students who are trying get their degrees to carry on with their careers.

One of the programs at Selkirk College is actually the Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, or what we’d called the RDI, and one of the initiatives of the RDI is to monitor and report on the state of the basin — a snapshot of what’s happening in our region. This is the Columbia River Basin, and it also includes Boundary country.

I thought it would be interesting to talk about what folks in our regions are saying about how they are doing

economically. Well, the consumer confidence is down. Only 25 percent of the people polled said they were better off financially as compared to six months ago, and this is down. Where it was 34 percent last year, it’s down to 25 percent.

In the workforce in our area, job losses are significant. Only 15 percent, which is about the same as last year, agree there are sufficient job opportunities available in their community. As far as total employment in the region, again, we saw a loss of about 9,000 jobs, which is huge in a region the size of ours. Unemployment took a slight upturn and is now at 6.9 percent, one of the largest in the province.

The size of our workforce, which is around the ages of 25 to 64, is also declining. Over the next 20 years, that workforce is declining. The number of seniors in our region is actually increasing. If this continues to happen, by 2035 there will be only 1.6 workers in our region for every senior, so we definitely need to look at more employment so that we can ensure that young people stay in our region instead of leaving.

Infrastructure is an interesting indicator. And in light of the situation with Prince Rupert and Kitimat last week.... Water systems were raised, and as of June 2015, 145 water systems in our region were under a formal advisory, up from 123 two years ago. The majority of notices have been active over five years — 145 water systems.

It’s interesting that there are also at least 150 social service organizations providing everything from literacy support to counselling to food security.

[1145]

Food banks. The number of food banks is growing with the number of people accessing them also growing. If our economy is so good, why is that? The sad fact is this is a growing phenomenon across the province. Access to food banks has increased by over 28 percent since 2008, and over 31 percent of those accessing food banks are children.

The member referred to tax breaks for farmers who donate to food banks. Wouldn’t it be better if farmers could actually sell that food and earn a decent standard of living? We wouldn’t have so many people in this province accessing food banks today.

People in the region, for the most part, support farmers markets. They want to eat food produced locally. Many say they can’t access local food, though, especially meat. I believe that the agricultural policies that this government has brought in have led to the decline in accessing locally grown food. The study showed that 300,000 acres of land in our region could be used for farming but isn’t being used for farming. People in our area say they can’t afford to farm in our area.

I think it’s all about who does benefit from this government’s policies when it comes to the economy: certainly the wealthy 2 percent, who got a huge tax break this year; not the average British Columbian, who’s paying more for

hydro, MSP, ICBC, education in both K to 12 and post-secondary, and also people who are struggling to find work — good family-supporting jobs. This is an economy that just doesn't work for everyone in this province.

J. Martin: There are few things I enjoy in this House more than having the opportunity to speak about how British Columbia is No. 1 in the country. We are leaders. We are the leaders in Confederation right now, and that is because of the focus of this B.C. Liberal government. We have maintained a focus on fiscal prudence. We have maintained a focus on creating a strong and diverse economy.

That focus has paid off. It has paid off because we are leading the country in job growth. We are seeing people moving back to British Columbia because of our jobs and because they see that more jobs will be created.

[Madame Speaker in the chair.]

Diversifying our economy means that we are not focused on a single sector or a single industry. We want to bring different areas of B.C.'s economy to thrive. We are seeing this happening right now with our film and our tech sectors. They have never been in better shape. We see huge increases in exports for our agricultural products. And we continue to train British Columbians for the many jobs that will be opening up as we continue to build our strong and diversified economy.

On the government side of the House, we know how to get to yes, while over there, all they know how to do is get to no. I'm sure they understand — well, I'm not sure they understand at all, actually — that by consistently balancing our budget and by maintaining our triple-A credit rating, we have more money to spend and put into services that help all British Columbians in all parts of the province.

We have been reducing our operating debt since 2013, and just since then, we have been able to invest \$500 million, thanks to lower interest costs. As we work to eliminate our operating debt, we'll have even more money to put toward services.

British Columbia continues to have one of the lowest overall tax burdens in the country when all taxes are considered and factored in. This includes income tax, consumption tax, health care premiums, payroll tax.

This is very, very different than what the province experienced in the '90s. At the end of that abysmal decade, B.C. had the highest personal income tax rates in the country. Between 1992 and 2000, B.C. had less private sector investment than any other part of the country. During that time, B.C.'s per-capita economic growth fell to dead last, from first to worst. These were not good times; these were the times, the days, of doom and gloom.

The economy was driven into the dirt. Business bankruptcies boomed in B.C., while they actually fell across

the country. In 1998, private sector investment dropped by more than 10 percent. Driving businesses out of the country is not good for British Columbia. During the '90s, the government drove away investment from B.C., they drove capital out of B.C., and sadly, they drove people out of B.C.

[1150]

Well, that's not the case today. We're seeing people coming back for jobs. We are seeing people coming back to British Columbia, where we say yes. B.C. is seeing the benefits of a diversified economy, of our government's commitment to controlling spending, balancing budgets and building our strong economy.

You don't build a strong economy by being the party of no — no to the Coquihalla Highway, no to the Port Mann Bridge, no to the Alex Fraser Bridge, no the South Fraser Perimeter Road. Getting to no is not the way to run a country. The opposition may not like that, according to an article in the *Vancouver Province* on the weekend, but if they want to say no to being the party of no, I guess that's a little bit surreal. I'm sure the Toronto Maple Leafs don't like being known as the worst franchise in sports history either, but there are some things that we can't deny. Facts are facts.

This government has a track record of saying yes to investment, yes to jobs, yes to helping British Columbians from one end of the province to the other. The people of British Columbia have put their confidence in us for many, many years. I have no doubt, along with all of my colleagues, that they're going to continue to put their confidence in us, because we have the best economy in the country. We have the best track record for creating jobs. We are on the verge of the best moment in this country's history, as B.C. is poised, once again, to lead Canada for years and for decades to come. That is not by accident. That is by hard work, and that is by doing the job that British Columbians asked us to do.

L. Krog: Well, I must say that if the member for Chilliwack isn't a master of the facts, he's certainly a master of hyperbole. My goodness. Here we're going to spend a whole hour this morning debating this motion: "Be it resolved that the province continues to be the strongest economy in Canada through sound fiscal management and creating more opportunities for British Columbians through a diversified economy." My goodness, it's like they were the Lord delivering the world here in beautiful B.C. Everything that is good about British Columbia is as a result of the B.C. Liberal government, or that's what they want you to believe.

I knew that would inspire them to listen with great care, because after all, swallowing the bathwater and regurgitating the bathwater is what the B.C. Liberals are best at doing.

Honest to heavens, when I listened to the speeches this morning and the hyperbole and the stretching of

the truth, the exaggeration, the taking of credit for everything that's good with no sense of responsibility for anything that might be wrong in British Columbia.... I'm always thrilled with the capacity of the B.C. Liberals to stand in this House and wax so eloquent about so much garbage and things that are simply not accurate.

The member talked about a focus on fiscal prudence. Well, how about focusing on the poor? How about focusing on the fact that it's been ten years since anyone on social assistance in this province saw an increase? If things are so wonderful, surely we can afford to provide a little bit of money for the most vulnerable amongst us. After all, we're going to have to accept that there aren't jobs for those people at the bottom of the economic totem pole. So if there isn't employment for them, doesn't it behoove good government to actually exercise some compassion and responsibility and, perhaps, look out for them?

We're now the second-lowest minimum wage in the country. I've said it a million times.... No, not a million. That would be an exaggeration. That would be a Trumpism. That would be more consistent with what the B.C. Liberals say. Let me just say that I've said it many times on many occasions in this House. In order to have the purchasing power it did when I was getting the minimum wage in 1971, in 1991 the minimum wage should have been \$11 an hour. Here we are in 2016, and we're worse off today than we were under the B.C. Socreds, for heaven's sake.

Interjection.

L. Krog: Ah, the member says: "Why didn't you jack it up?" The member points out something, because he knows his history so well. In fact, under the NDP, we did raise the minimum wage. We didn't raise it far enough, hon. Member, but I am thrilled to say that our record compared to your record in terms of caring for the vulnerable and the poor in this province is far superior, and the statistics are there to prove it.

[1155]

Now, today we heard the members bragging about the B.C. film industry and how well it's doing. Oh goodness, absolutely. And you might remember. What was the government that provided the initial credits to the B.C. film industry that made it a viable and successful industry? Oh, that would be the B.C. NDP in the '90s. Now we see a boom in the film industry, yes, because the dollar, after years of Conservative government in Ottawa, is at such

a low ebb that you'd be an idiot not to come to British Columbia and produce films here.

Their kissing cousins in Ottawa helped put us in this mess, which has now given a bit of a boom to B.C., by lowering our dollar to such an extent that it's profitable for film companies to do their production here in British Columbia. Oh, that's a record to be proud of.

I've got to tell you that when I take the helijet to Vancouver, I drive across this great big, flat piece of tarmac in beautiful downtown Nanaimo that used to be stacked with lumber ready to be loaded on ships. And you know what I can see out in the harbour of Nanaimo now? I can see freighters loading up raw logs for shipment to China.

Tell me: is that diversifying British Columbia's economy? Is that supporting jobs and the economy of British Columbia? Is that providing real taxation or revenue to the province? No. That's the result of direct B.C. Liberal government policy that has allowed the most significant increase in the export of raw logs in the history of this province, and that is a fact. That's not hyperbole. Those members sitting there this morning know that, and they have stood around and watched one of the basic and most sustainable industries in this province be destroyed by their deliberate government policy.

So when I see a motion like this and have to listen to the members brag about all the good things for over an hour....

Madame Speaker: Thank you, Member.

L. Krog: I know that they would be delighted to hear me say more, but noting the hour, I would move adjournment of the debate.

L. Krog moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. M. Polak moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Madame Speaker: This House, at its rising, stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

HANSARD REPORTING SERVICES

Director
Robert Sutherland

Manager of Reporting Services
Christine Fedoruk

Publishing Supervisor
Laurel Bernard

Editorial Team Leaders
Janet Brazier, Karol Morris, Robyn Swanson, Glenn Wigmore

Technical Operations Officers
Pamela Holmes, Dan Kerr, Yvonne Mendel

Indexers
Shannon Ash, Julie McClung, Robin Rohrmoser

Researchers
Liz Belsten, Mike Beninger, Mary Beth Hall, David Mattison

Editors
Kim Christie, Deirdre Gotto, Jane Grainger, Betsy Gray,
Iris Gray, Linda Guy, Barb Horricks, Bill Hrick, Jessica Hutchings,
Jennifer Kaddoura, Catherine Lang, Paula Lee, Donna McCloskey,
Bob McIntosh, Anne Maclean, Claire Matthews, Jill Milkert, Lind Miller,
Erik Pedersen, Janet Pink, Amy Reiswig, Murray Sinclair,
Antoinette Warren, Heather Warren, Arlene Wells, Kim Westad

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

Printing Agent
Crown Publications, Queen's Printer for British Columbia
PO Box 9452 Stn Prov Govt, Victoria, B.C. V8W 9V7
www.crownpub.bc.ca

Daily and annual *Hansard* subscription information
is available from Crown Publications.

www.leg.bc.ca

Access to on-line versions of the official report of debates (*Hansard*)
and webcasts of proceedings is available on the Internet.
Chamber debates are broadcast on television.