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

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
Her Honour the Honourable Janet Austin, OBC

FIFTH SESSION, 41ST PARLIAMENT

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Party Standings: BC Liberal 42; NDP 41; Independent 2; BC Green Party 2
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Afternoon Sitting

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2020

The House met at 1:33 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Routine Business

Introductions by Members

S. Chandra Herbert: In my short statement earlier today about love, I neglected to mention my love for my good friend Amanda, without whom we would not have the birthday of my son Dev tomorrow, and for my staff, who do incredible work. I want to send my love to them, and a happy Valentine’s to you as well, hon. Speaker, and, of course, the table and all staff here too.

Interjection.

S. Chandra Herbert: Well, I already wished you a happy Valentine’s. I know the member for Chilliwack-Kent wanted a special valentine from me. I’ll send one to him. Of course, every member in this House is deserving of some love.

I see and I choo-choo-choose you, Member. Happy Valentine’s Day.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. Farnworth: I call continued Address in Reply to the throne speech.

Throne Speech Debate

(continued)

Hon. H. Bains: It is, once again — after the break — to get back into my throne speech, which I’m speaking in favour of. I know before the break, I managed to draw their attention. At least they listened, and I think that’s one of the very few times that they actually paid attention to what’s being said sensibly here in this House. So I will continue.

I talked about, overall, the goals of the government, what we have achieved and where we want to go. That is listed in the throne speech. But I want to come back to the comments that were being made a little bit about forestry and my own ministry.

[1:35 p.m.]

[S. Gibson in the chair.]

It’s no secret that there was a time, when I was actively working in the forest industry in the ’70s, ’80s and ’90s, that United States companies would come and invest in British Columbia — the Weyerhaeusers of the world. They came and invested. They saw a future in the forestry industry in British Columbia. So what had happened…. Since 2001, that trend changed.

The member from Nechako knows very well, because he was the minister, that our B.C. companies…. Never mind the United States companies coming and investing. They’re not looking at B.C. anymore — for the last 16 years. In fact, our B.C. companies — Canfor, West Fraser, Interfor, Teal-Jones and a number of others — are investing in the United States. These are B.C. companies. That started in the early 2000s.

Now, can I blame everything on the B.C. Liberal government? I think the tendency is there, but I would say that the reality is that the softwood lumber dispute, shrinking fibre supply in British Columbia and, yes, the policies, the so-called Forest (Revitalization) Amendment Act that they brought in…. They delinked the social contract that existed between the public of this province and these companies. They basically delinked it. Now there’s no requirement for B.C. companies to process timber here in their own mills or in British Columbia, to create jobs in British Columbia.

For that matter, the record amount of the export of raw logs took place during their time, since 2000. At one time, 7.5 million cubic metres were shipped out. Not only that; there is a surplus test that they must go through in order to export timber. The Minister of Forests appointed that committee, called TEAC, the timber export advisory committee.

You know what? So 112 times that committee decided that certain applications for export did not meet the access test. What happened? These companies…. They had friends in government. They supported them. They donated big money to the B.C. Liberals to put them in power. What happened? They went to the minister. The minister overruled each and every one of those application times and allowed those applications to proceed. That timber got exported. In the meantime, our mills in British Columbia were left running under capacity or not running at all. That is reality. That’s what happened under their watch.

Anyway, we’re working hard to make sure that the forest industry is back on its feet. Once again, it has become the engine of our economy that will drive our economy. I think people of those regions and those communities that depend on forestry deserve that from their own government — that the logs and the raw material that is extracted from their communities, in their neighbourhoods, is used to create jobs for them in their communities so that those members can benefit and their communities where they live benefit.

Coming back to the throne speech again, I would say that every word delivered Tuesday by Her Honour was the foundation — that our work to date and our work going forward is focused on making life better for British Col-
As the Minister of Labour, I’m particularly delighted that this year’s throne speech offered a distinct lens on actions we have taken to support the working people in B.C. and on actions ahead. To echo the Lieutenant-Governor’s words: “British Columbia is a province with limitless potential.” But for a long time, many people felt stuck. Wages didn’t grow. Opportunities seemed increasingly out of reach. Despite how hard they worked, people still felt left behind.

For me, a fundamental example of that is when the economy soared, the cost of living grew, but the wages for the lowest-paid workers remained stagnant. How did that happen? They froze the minimum wage for the lowest-paid workers for ten years.

At the same time, they gave tax breaks to the highest-paid workers, the highest 1 percent of paid workers in British Columbia. Those were their priorities. We’re fixing that, bringing balance back.

For me, and particularly for those struggling to make ends meet, that is hard to reconcile when in Canada, one of the most affluent countries in the world, and in B.C., one of the wealthiest economies in Canada, there still are far too many working poor, far too many choosing rent over groceries because they couldn’t afford both or couldn’t afford a lunch to send their kids to school with.

To help lift people out of poverty, we set a fair and predictable path towards a minimum wage of at least $15.20 an hour by 2021. We will have one of the highest minimum wages in Canada at that point. While the minimum wage inches up, we’re also eliminating the lower, discriminatory liquor server wages in a similar fair, predictable and incremental way by 2021.

Growing out of this work is a further study on how to close the gap between the minimum wage and the living wage through the Fair Wages Commission and how to address the status of piece rates paid to those who harvest certain crops by hand in the agriculture industry.

People felt stuck because they worked hard but couldn’t get ahead; stuck because they didn’t feel heard, like they were shouting into the wind while crying out for government support; stuck between a rock and a hard place, because government had not kept pace with modernized labour laws amidst a changing work environment.

They knew, for instance, that they had rights under the Employment Standards Act that weren’t being upheld. Employer obligations with respect to employment standards were being circumvented because there were too many barriers placed by the previous government. That is why we introduced new rules for wage recovery, proactive audit and investigations and eliminated the self-help kit.

Their rules protecting the integrity of the union certification process and collective bargaining under the labour relations code were not balanced or contributing to labour stability. I must say this: that every worker in this country has a constitutional right to join a union association of their choice without any interference by their boss. That’s what we are trying to do, which wasn’t available to them. That fairness wasn’t there under the previous government.

In addition, we are providing direct support to the Interior forestry workers whose lives and livelihood are being impacted by an industry in crisis. We opened five job placement offices to connect displaced forestry workers with new jobs and training opportunities. Over 350 workers have accessed our placement offices so far for services.

We also established an early retirement bridging program to help older workers retire early, creating more job vacancies for others. To date, I’m proud to say that $5 million has been committed to 132 impacted workers who have lost their jobs to a permanent closure, and more are filing every day. The circumstances this industry is facing are difficult, and we want to support all displaced forestry workers affected by mill closures in the best way possible.

So while some criticize the throne speech, reflecting — and I’ve heard this in this room too much — on our past track record and not enough on our path forward, the throne speech speaks to how far we have come, as a benchmark, and as a springboard to how much further we still have to go.

For instance, we have done much to help protect some of the province’s most vulnerable workers. For example, we introduced new laws requiring recruiters of foreign workers to be licensed. Building on that, we have introduced a registry for employers wishing to hire temporary foreign workers. Another example: we introduced new laws limiting unsafe work for children and youth and now will bring in regulations that define dangerous jobs. Another example is longer, more flexible job-protected leaves for people caring for terminally ill loved ones or a parent caring for a new child or coping with the death or disappearance of a child.

The Lieutenant-Governor, in her speech, reminded us that last year we introduced a new unpaid job-protected leave for people fleeing domestic or sexual violence. We are using that as a springboard this session to provide added support for people experiencing violence, because we heard in large numbers during an expansive public engagement process that people experiencing domestic or sexual violence felt that they were stuck between seeking help and retaining their jobs or self-reliance. We heard that assurance of a paycheque while getting help is critical. Seeking help shouldn’t be a choice of your life or livelihood.

It’s not lost on us that a person who has experienced violence may need to be seen by a physician or therapist, may need to visit a financial institution to establish a personal bank account and redirect a paycheque and may need to find safe housing for themselves and their chil-
government is the cornerstone of what we do here. It gives us direction. It maps out our vision. It outlines the vision of what we are going to be doing here. The throne speech maps out what the government is standing for. I think I'd probably have better results from Google Maps, myself.

Throne speech day was one of the most interesting, though, as well as one of the most boring days I've had in my role as MLA. Outside there was chaos, and I'll refrain from that discussion for a little bit later. Inside this chamber, during the throne speech, was a cricket party. There was zero energy in the room as we sat and listened to back-patting and self-congratulations that sounded really no different from last year's speech.

I looked at last year's throne speech, which unfortunately I didn't get a chance to read because government only talked about it for a couple days. But I looked at the notes in that. And today I'll be talking about almost the same stuff that was in last year's throne speech and the throne speech the year before that as well. In fact, it kind of reminds me of Bill Murray's Groundhog Day, coming over and over and over.

We listened to this government tout the record and claim that all is well. But, again, the energy in the room was absent — absent. A truly inspiring throne speech should harness this energy. We would've all felt it.

What is most concerning, though, is the fact that there was no vision for stimulating the economy. No real talk of job creation, encouraging connections to new markets. No vision for the future of British Columbia's resource sector. Most certainly, no real vision for my riding of Peace River North.

Many of my constituents — and I can talk for many rural constituents in B.C. — have never felt more disconnected from this government than they are feeling right now. From the government attacks on our industries to the botched handling of the caribou, and most recently, government dealing with the treaty land entitlement, which has been completely botched in the North Peace and has caused so much division — a complete failure on the part of this government.

Where are the solutions to the woes that our caucus has been raising and rallying against for months? There was no plan to offset the damage of this government's mismanagement of key files that they have inflicted over the past year. There was no plan, which is the problem. Add to this list of broken election promises, and what I see is a government that is clamouring for things that they feel proud about, while not laying out a plan that British Columbians feel confident in.

What is most clear is that this government seems to have no idea how to make life more affordable, which is really funny because it's the exact opposite of what they've been saying all along, to "make life more affordable." Come to the north and talk to my constituents. They will give you a very different answer.
In fact, life has never been more expensive for British Columbians right now — 19 new increased taxes.

Everything that this government has seen as a win, such as the elimination of the MSP, has been severely tainted by their reality. The employers health tax is crushing small businesses with this supposed win of eliminating the MSP, which is really just rebranded into a new tax. That’s part of the issue. Everything that this government seems to claim as a victory has a dark side that they shy away from.

Jobs are another matter. That is proving to be a losing battle with this government. I’m sorry, but they cannot be trusted for a strong economy. In fact, B.C. has registered, in seven months out of the last eight months, job losses. That’s not a record to be proud of. This is the reality of British Columbians this week while they probably embarrassingly listened to the throne speech.

You can’t paper over the fact that some of these old promises are wrapped in new words. Again, looking through my throne speech last year and the year before that, this is just a regurgitation of the same stuff over and over again. It equals British Columbians not getting ahead. People in the Peace country, people in rural B.C., are falling behind.

As I mentioned a moment ago, job losses are very concerning. The actual latest job numbers show another 6,000 full-time jobs gone last month.

That means that over the past eight months, we’ve lost a total of 32,800 jobs. How is that a sustainable model? Prices and taxes are going up. Jobs are going down. Everybody in the province loses. No plans for mining. No plans for forestry. No vision for the oil and gas sector; for the service economy. No ideas for economic development of any kind.

Shocking. Scary for my riding and other rural ridings across the province to see something that we have embraced, something that has sustained our families and, indeed, sustained this province starting to go down the toilet. There are no ideas for growing the sectors that build our communities and generate our shared opportunities — just burdensome taxes, layers of red tape and limited foresight.

I wish I could be more positive, but I cannot find anything positive in this throne speech. Where are the plans to open new global markets? Oh, wait, they’re closing our trade offices, I understand. I guess that one’s not a priority. The vision for creating opportunities? Well, not in this throne speech. The ideas to spark new investment in our province, to bring capital money to our province, to bring job creation? Not in this throne speech.

Competitiveness. We are now dead last on the continent when it comes to competitiveness. I’ve spoken with many folks in the resource sector, and I represent a lot of resource companies — forestry, mining. We have oil and gas, agriculture all up in Peace River North. I’ve had these conversations with many people. Farming, for crying out loud. We’ve even lost our competitive edge in farming. This government has completely killed our competitive edge, and there’s nothing in this throne speech that points to that returning anytime soon.

You know, it’s lovely. Recently they had…. Well, they called it a cabinet shuffle. I’m not too sure if I would call it a cabinet shuffle. They swapped a couple of ministers out, renamed a ministry to the Minister of Jobs, Economic Development and Competitiveness. I actually laughed when I read that. I found it quite funny, because just adding the word “competitiveness” does not make British Columbia competitive. We need action. We need the government to do something to get us back on track and get our resources to market. We’re not seeing our government do this, and we certainly are not seeing this in the throne speech. I hope that we do see something in the budget next week.

You know, there’s more to ticketing scalpers and reducing our cell phone bills. But people need jobs. People need to provide for their families. They need to provide for themselves. I don’t think that is too much to ask for.

Forestry communities are still in complete destitute…. Yet our hands-off Premier has pretty much general disregard for this, it seems. It’s a sector that is in crisis. I’ve used the word multiple times. It is in crisis. Layoffs, shutdowns announced consistently throughout the NDP’s term in government. There are now more than 100 mill curtailments — ten of them indefinitely or permanently closed down, including one mill in my community, the OSB plant. It’s a horrific statistic, if this continues, and it’s going to continue to haunt these communities until something is done. Yet most of what we seem to have heard from this government is mocking this.

Our Premier, the Premier of the largest softwood producer in the country, could not be bothered to join other Premiers from Canada when they visited Washington to try and fight for a better deal for their provinces. Where was our Premier to fight for a better softwood deal? I used the cricket analogy earlier on. There it is again — the Forest Minister claiming that it’s not a crisis. The parliamentary secretary saying, “Oh, there are too many mills anyways,” right here in this House. It’s an abysmal response.

Attempts to alleviate this pressure have not fared that much better. The petty handout packages that we’ve seen don’t provide real support. These are not solutions to the problem. We proposed a five-point action plan that would’ve provided tax relief and assistance, but the NDP chose to ignore this. In fact, one of my colleagues was talking about this, and the Premier referred to her constituents as “spoiled children” in this House — horrible.

To add to this fact, the government then pilfered the rural dividend fund, which is already a lifeline for many rural communities across the province to help them get ahead. Again, no real regard for rural British Columbia.
Back to the land of unaffordability, housing costs in much of the Lower Mainland are still beyond comprehension. Vancouver has the second least affordable housing in the world, with the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Vancouver being just over $2,000. Where's the promised $400 annual renters rebate? A false election promise vaporized. Dealing with gas prices that continue to soar, and a bogus review with parameters that would never have dealt with the real problem or looked for the real cause. That's taxation. We know that.

Let's look at a few things. Education. Well, let me start, first of all, by thanking all of our teachers for their incredible work. Education does lay the foundation for our society and provides our young graduates with the skills to communicate, cooperate, build an economy and just be successful in life. B.C.'s education system is consistently ranked as one of the best in the world, but we can always do better.

I'm particularly impressed with the fact of the Indigenous high school graduation rate that has reached 70 percent in B.C., but work still remains to be done to close that gap. Indigenous and non-Indigenous graduates — we need to ensure that our education system benefits everybody. Teachers do deserve the most credit for this improvement. Without their dedication to achieving better outcomes for students, regardless of their background, we would not have the high success rates that we see today. As a teacher myself, I saw so many incredible teachers that make an unbelievable difference in many of our students' lives.

I'd be remiss, though, if I also didn't recognize our school districts — the great deal of work that they do to make sure that our students have what they need to attain these goals. They have a very challenging job themselves.

As critic for Education, it is also my responsibility to hold the government accountable to their promises, whether that's child care spaces, hospitals or portables. The NDP have made grand, grand election promises and have not delivered on any of them — vaporized.

Unfortunately, the government continues to fail Surrey parents and students who were promised the elimination of portables. In fact, at the start of the school year, there were 361 portables in the school district of Surrey alone. That's a 32 percent increase from the time that they promised to eliminate the portables in just four years. We knew all along that that promise was unattainable. Again, a false election promise was made.

B.C. families are currently facing increased uncertainty about their futures, as this government has yet to reach a deal with B.C. teachers. Only sporadic meetings have taken place since the summer of 2019. Each month without meaningful contract talks brings B.C. students closer to the prospect of another teacher job action. We do need the minister to take action sooner than later to relieve the mounting anxiety among parents, teachers and, of course, our students.

In talking with school districts around the province, we are still critically short of teachers. The minister, though, seems to downplay this often and counts teachers that are teaching on a letter of permission. This is not how we solve the teacher shortage. This isn't the fix. We need a real plan to train, recruit and retain teachers. I know the government knows this, but we need to see something in the throne speech, and we need to see something in the budget next week that will directly deal with this. This is an issue. This isn't just a rural issue, but it's an issue across the province.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't include the shortage of French immersion teachers. We'll be closely watching the budget next week to make sure that there is something in there to deal with this.

Housing. Some prices are going back up after a very modest decline, but prices still aren't remotely affordable. Housing starts are down 40 percent in B.C. The NDP has only built 2,400 new affordable housing units versus the election promise of 114,000. Vaporized — another election promise gone. At this rate — and we've heard this number used here before — it would take the NDP government over 100 years to fulfil this promise to build 114,000 new housing units.

Nothing, though, there. Nothing talked about in the throne speech to deal with the supply issue. There's nothing to encourage building. Instead, NDP taxes, red tape, yadda, yadda, yadda, are causing project after project to be cancelled. This is not dealing with the housing crisis.

Our caucus staff, in their diligent work, have routinely demonstrated that the figures shared by this government tend to look good but hide the reality. Reannouncements of previously announced projects seem to be a new past-time of this government.

The $10-a-day child care election promise seems to be a slow-burning failure, as only 2,055 child care spaces have been created, versus the election promise of 24,000. Vaporized. I don't know, but you can maybe see a trend here about election promises and the reality that we’re seeing here today, almost three years after the fact. And I'm only touching on a few things. I'm sure the rest of my colleagues, as we talk about the throne speech, will come up with many of their own examples as well.

Promised numbers, photo ops that seem empty — when you peek your head behind the curtain, that's where we see the reality. This is not making things affordable for British Columbians. Quite the opposite.

As I move to conclude my remarks, what is clear is that this government is the same old NDP of the past, addicted to taxes with no idea on how to deliver a vision for a better future for everyone that lives in British Columbia. I hear groans across the way.

The reality, and we can see it over and over, is the government failing to deliver what British Columbians need. It's clear that the NDP have no real vision — no real vision for making life better for people, for helping families get
That’s what my constituents in Peace River North want. They want an opportunity. They want the opportunity to provide for their families. We need this government to give this opportunity for everyone in British Columbia.

J. Sims: It is my pleasure today to rise and speak on a throne speech that encapsulates the values and our commitments that we made to the public when we ran for office — values and commitments that we are delivering on.

Let me remind my colleague across the way that our province still has, and we’re very proud of this, a triple-A credit rating. It has the best economic growth forecasts across the country. It has the lowest unemployment rate.

What we’re so proud of is the fact that we have been able to address some of the major concerns of British Columbians. One of them was affordability. You know what this government was able to deliver? The largest tax break British Columbians have known since 1948 — the largest tax break. That is the elimination of the MSP. That, for the very first time, puts British Columbians on par with the rest of the country, because nobody else in Canada was paying medical service premiums. Only British Columbia was.

Now, as my colleagues across the way say, yes, there is a health tax, as it exists in other provinces as well. A very small percentage of our businesses actually pay that health tax. But you know, that is the cost of doing business.

We are also trying to, I would say, fix a dumpster fire left to us by the previous government. You’ve seen that there are major reforms coming to ICBC, and we’re very proud of that. Some of those reforms have already taken place, but others were hinted at. I know that when British Columbians see those, they will see the benefit to their pocketbook, and they will see that it is good for them. Here I’m just trying to give you an overview, and then I’ll get into things in more detail.

Unfair bridge tolls. It always irked me — maybe because I have family that lives south of Fraser, and I live south of Fraser, and I have family that lives north of Fraser as well — that there were only two bridges that had tolls on them. They both impacted people south of Fraser the most.

There were other bridges built at that time, notably one in Kelowna that — surprise, surprise — had no toll on it. But for people south of Fraser, who have been starved of investments in public transit and infrastructure, they had to pay the tolls. I’m so proud of the fact that we eliminated those tolls. That saved families about $1,500 per year. I’m hearing from many families in my constituency office that the savings are far greater for many who have kids going to school or who happen to have to travel across those bridges.

I’m also pleased to announce, as the hard-working Minister of Labour talked about earlier, that the minimum wage is also being addressed. Unlike the previous government that really condoned child labour and wages that were just absolutely outrageous, we have implemented, in a graduated way, a minimum wage to make sure that people who do a full day’s work have the right to go home and have some stability. Not enough, but more to be done.

When it comes to the housing crisis, I was surprised to hear my friend across the way saying that we haven’t done enough. I agree with him. We need to do a lot more, but we have done far, far more than they did in 16 years.

When you look at the money laundering that was allowed to explode during the previous government’s reign, so to speak, and how it impacted our housing market…. When I saw families, including my own family members and many of my constituents, seeing buying a house get out of their reach…. They just could not see how a house within a year could go up by $400,000, by $350,000. You know, those were the amounts that people thought were outrageous for a house price, never mind the way they went up.

So yes, we’re very proud of the steps we’ve taken so far. They seem to be working. I’m glad my colleague acknowledged that — that there has been some moderation.

We are encouraging more development — more rental development, more strata buildings, high density. That’s what governments do. You know what? When I looked at the permits that are being issued by cities, they haven’t gone down, not in the Lower Mainland. They have actually gone up. The building trade is doing well. More houses will be built. That is all good.

Now, let’s talk about child care a little bit. This is a topic that’s close and dear to my heart. I keep hearing my colleague across the way saying: “You know, this government hasn’t done anything. It’s been about photo ops.” I want to remind them. That’s their specialty. When they were in government, it was to do photo ops.

There were lots done in the city of Surrey. Many, many were done. “We’re going to build a hospital here. We’re going to build a hospital here.” “Oh, yes, this is where we’re going to build a hospital.” And then — surprise, surprise — not even a concept plan, not even a business plan, nothing in the books for a hospital for Surrey.

So I know they used the photo ops, and I know they think that everything can happen just like that. But it does take time to build, and we’re doing that. That’s why this throne speech reflects the continuation of the good work we’ve been doing and building on that foundation so that if we had child care spaces that we’ve developed over the last three years, what we’re going to be focusing on the next year is to develop more.

This is where I want to talk about Surrey a little bit. All of us always want to know: “Okay. So what’s happening in my own riding?” I think this is when it comes home to you, when your own constituents come and tell you what a difference the child care is making. I really want to thank
both Minister Conroy and Minister of State Chen for the amazing work they have done in this area.

Let me tell you, in Surrey-Panorama alone, $8,155,749 has been spent on child care. That's right in Surrey-Panorama. Just to let you know, the parents in Surrey-Panorama alone have benefitted in close to $6 million being returned to them in the way of reduced fees and benefits. That is good news, because that is money that immediately goes back into the pockets of families that live there. So that is a good thing. When it comes to child care and when it comes to housing, once again, I’m very proud of the work that has been done in Surrey.

As always, education. I cannot stand up here and talk about education…. I do want to thank the Minister of Education, who is here — I’m not supposed to say that — for the amazing tenacity he has shown in building new schools in Surrey. I want to say to him, a big, big thank-you. Over 7,500 students were in portables when we became government, and we made a commitment that we would be building schools. Now Surrey has experienced growth.

Let me just read out a list of some of the new schools that have just gone up in Surrey or are in the process: Salish Secondary School; Woodward Hill elementary school with an addition; Panorama Park in my riding, an elementary school with an addition; Pacific Heights Elementary School, addition; Coyote Creek Elementary with an addition; Frost Road Elementary; Sullivan Elementary with an addition; Douglas area elementary, new school; Edgewood Drive elementary, new school; Grandview Heights secondary, new school; Maddaugh elementary, new school; Regent Road Elementary, new school; Sullivan Heights Secondary, a new addition.

That doesn't even count in the properties that have been bought, for the first time in a very long time, for future growth. Not only that, but the seismic upgrades have been bought; for the first time in a very long time, for future growth so that we are not always catching up. We are planning for the future. Not only that, but the seismic upgrades that have gone on.

At this stage, I do want to take a moment to say a very special thank-you to the B.C. Teachers Federation, because the B.C. Teachers Federation did something that, to me, is iconic. When they lost major protections for students’ learning conditions from their collective agreements, they took that to the Supreme Court of Canada. And when they took that to the Supreme Court of Canada, they won. That has put close to 4,000 additional teachers in the classrooms, providing care for students who need it.

I want to say that we are also pleased at the latest round — the announcement that was made on the funding formula — that for the first time there is going to be money allocated to address the special needs of those students who are living in care and who are in the public care system. So much is happening in this area, and I know that there is a lot more work to be done.

I am not going to make a comment on collective bargaining, because that happens in a different arena, but I can tell you that when I see the commitment that this minister has, this Premier has and this government has for public education, I am always, always impressed.

Now let me talk about health care a little bit. Being from Surrey, once again, that is so, so important for us, because we did feel like the neglected child. For a fast-growing city like Surrey, we had one hospital, one emergency room that was jam-packed. Unfortunately, I’ve had to spend many a night in that emergency room with my aging mom. Sometimes you were in the corridor for three days and three nights before any other space could be found for you.

I’m very, very pleased — after, I would say, photo-op promises by the previous government — that our government has announced that a hospital will be built. A concept plan has been completed, and now the business plan is in process. Because the previous property had been sold by the outgoing government, a piece of property has been bought. We know where the hospital is going to be, and we cannot wait for that hospital to start being built.

Also in Surrey, we invested $4.6 million to open B.C.’s first Mental Health and Substance Use Urgent Care Response Centre at the hospital and invested $3.1 million for an urgent primary care centre in Surrey on top of that, in November last year, which serves 5,000 patients. In partnership with the First Nations Health Authority, we have also opened up Fraser Health’s first Indigenous Primary Health and Wellness Home in Surrey — all very, very critical.

We’ve invested $8 million to expand the acute care unit chemotherapy area of the Fraser Valley Cancer Centre in Surrey. We’ve increased hip and knee replacement surgeries by 23 percent. We’ve increased MRI exams, and we have purchased a private MRI clinic in Surrey, which has added a capacity of 5,000 additional MRI scans per year. We’ve invested another $5.5 million to open a new 3T MRI suite at the Jim Pattison Outpatient Care Centre.

Age-friendly grants are being awarded to seniors to help them with their mobility. We’ve also expanded the Peace Arch Hospital, and we’ve increased staffing levels in seniors long-term care. As you can see, in Surrey, we are feeling that a lot has been happening.

I want to talk a little bit about jobs right now, because I heard a lot about that from my colleague across the way earlier. I am very proud of the work we’ve done in this area to grow a diverse economy — a sustainable economy that keeps in mind our duty to look after Mother Earth but at the same time to make sure we use our resources wisely and also that we develop those resources.

I’m proud to say that B.C. — Vancouver — is a magnet for the tech sector. We have organizations like Microsoft coming here now with their cybersecurity centre and many other tech companies that are coming and bringing with them well-paying jobs — not just into the Lower
Mainland but when you go to Rossland, to Trail, to Nelson, to Campbell River. You can go to many, and wherever you go, the tech industry is alive. They have become aware that with our investments in fibre optics, we are actually increasing and opening opportunities and doors for the tech sector to absolutely expand here, and it is growing.

The other thing is that we’re a government that doesn’t just think about the top 1 percent. We’re a government that does long-term planning. We’ve often made ten-year announcements, and we are a government that is investing in B.C. We are investing in infrastructure, in roads, in bridges — a new Pattullo Bridge for Surrey. Once again, a $1.37 billion investment, creating thousands of local jobs.

Planning for the Massey Tunnel or bridge is well under way. We’re very, very pleased at the progress that is making, because for the first time, you have a unanimous agreement from the mayors as to the kind of crossing they would like to see there.

I see all the work that is being done on the roads and on the highways. Schools are being built. Hospitals are being built. Bridges are being built. Child care centres are being built. When all this is happening, that means there are jobs.

We have made a determined effort, through the efforts of our hard-working minister for post-secondary and skill development, that we are investing in British Columbians. We are investing to make sure that we give the training and develop the red seal skills that are needed so that we have a strong and diverse workforce, so much so that we have even invested in people who are 55-plus — I went to do the announcement for that — who are going through career transitions because there are many things happening in the career industry. Things are changing. So we’re assisting with career transitions as well.

When I look at Surrey, just when we look at the prioritizing of local jobs, 1,200 to 1,400 local people will be employed as the Pattullo Bridge gets built. That is quite an economic boost to south of the Fraser and to the Lower Mainland and attracts lots of jobs. On top of that, just in the Surrey area alone, we have awarded $21 million in contracts to Surrey-based companies to complete road projects in communities. That is investing.

Good governance is about making sure that people have jobs. Good governance is about making sure that people have services. Good governance is about making sure that you invest in infrastructure, which we do. I think.... I know I’m very proud of the work that this government is doing to make sure that we are investing in our economy. We’re growing our economy, growing decent-paying jobs. How are we doing it? We are doing it by investing in child care. We are doing it by investing in our kids through building schools. We are doing it through building hospitals. We are going to carry on doing those things.

I just do want to acknowledge at this time, talking about children, my two wonderful kids, Kiran and Michael Sims, who have been there for me constantly as I came on this journey of life in the political arena and who are my inspiration. On the days that some of the work looks challenging, as it did on Tuesday, they phone you up, and they lift you up.

I also want to say how much I love my grandchildren, of course, three of them, and now my great-granddaughter, and how proud I am to be one of the living five women who are first-borns in my family. It is such a delight.

I would be remiss if today I did not thank the hard-working staff I have here in the Legislature and also in my own riding, who, when I’m not there, make sure that they are serving the constituents in a way that meets their needs.

Deputy Speaker: Nine minutes.

J. Sims: Nine minutes? Oh, thank you so much. So I do want to take a moment.

Interjections.

J. Sims: Oh, I do.

I do want to, at this time, also acknowledge the work that has been done by our Minister of Agriculture. She took on a very challenging task of addressing saving our prime farmland for our food security. She came through with some legislation, which I know was controversial. But she made a commitment to the people at the time: that she was listening, and that for farmers, for people who were actually farming, there were opportunities to build larger homes to accommodate their families.

But she also was very, very firm that our farmland is there for us to grow our food. It is there for our children
and for our children’s children. Once we lose our farmland, reclaiming it is not that easy. It’s not like just going in there and saying: “Oh, today we’re going to farm on it.”

I’m really proud of the minister. She went into a consultation process and listened, and when she came out with the recent regulations, those regulations reflected what she had heard through her consultations.

The previous legislation is still in place and is working, but really, she made accommodations for a family that may want to have elderly parents living with them — maybe not in the house, but in a separate unit. She’s made accommodations for a family that may have a service care provider like a nanny or long-term care, who they may not want to have living in the house but on site. Those accommodations have been made.

What really excites me is when I see this minister travel around the province, and she is, like the Eveready bunny, everywhere. She goes around, and she gets so excited about not only the food we grow but the use of it — you know, eating local food.

It’s under her watch and the watch of Minister Dix that we have seen two health authorities now — I think three, maybe — that are going to be using local food in the hospitals. That is a big, big step.

I spent a lot of time, as I said previously, both in the emergency room and in the hospital. And really, some of the food I saw there…. I’m glad that we are introducing more local food that is healthy and all of those things.

[2:35 p.m.]

I have a lot of chance to talk about all of the amazing things we are doing in Surrey, but I didn’t really get a chance to say that not only is Surrey getting a new hospital, but Burnaby is getting one. Vancouver is getting one. I see hospitals being announced in the north and in the Interior, irrespective of who that MLA represents — because they represent their constituents — or which party they are from.

I have been so proud of the work done by the Health Minister as he has grown urgent care centres, primary care centres and hospitals in every corner of this province. That says a lot. So it isn’t just…. When I look at some of the schools that have opened up in Surrey, they have opened up where many of the members who are sitting across the road from me…. We are very, very delighted about that.

In a similar way, as we all know, the Minister of Environment has been busy working. As we have said, we have to look for that balance. I hear about that from my children and grandchildren all the time — about the need for us to be cognizant about the impact of global warming and what we’re doing to Mother Planet and that we must leave something behind for them. So I’m very, very proud of the work we’ve done around electrification, around promoting electric cars and looking at alternate energies, but also, through retrofits, making sure that we can meet our goals.

The investments we’re attracting…. You would think, from across the way, that we were not attracting investment. When I look at the companies that are moving in here…. I just mentioned Microsoft, and Amazon just moved in. There are others who are looking to come here. I also have to say that it took an NDP government and an NDP premier to sign on the LNG and to bring that to fruition. I know work was done on that by the previous government as well, but at the end of the day, it’s who can bring the deal home. I’m very, very proud of the work that was done by the Premier and the minister to make sure that was addressed.

In the light of everything that’s going on, I do want to say I am very proud of the work we have done in the area of truth and reconciliation — very, very proud of our work. I have no regrets. I’m very proud of the way my Premier has responded and reacted to what is going on. Not one of us in this House endorses any kind of violence. But we also know that we’re privileged to live in a country where we do have the right to peaceful protest. Those protests are going on right now, but despite that, we cannot let that be a distraction from the ongoing work, which, as the Premier often says, is the hard, hard work of truth and reconciliation.

I want to remind each and every one of us that we all committed to that. We all voted for that. So let us all, each and every one of us, do our part in lifting the move towards truth and reconciliation in a meaningful way. I knew when we were voting on it and discussing it — it was very emotional in this House — that that was the beginning. The hard work was ahead. I think Tuesday showed us that the hard work is ahead, and we have a lot of work to do in that area.

But let me end now by saying that I couldn’t be prouder of a government that has a throne speech that is not about photo ops and that is actually about deliverables and about addressing the serious issue of child care, which is both an economic investment as well as good for children and families.

It is about addressing the housing crisis that is real in a meaningful way, a tough road ahead for us; addressing the infrastructure that we need for hospitals, schools, child care centres, roads and highways; making sure that we have a clean B.C. — well, we do know that we have a very forward-looking plan, maybe cutting edge in the country; making sure that we do the work on truth and reconciliation; making sure we’re looking after our resources and using them in a way that will benefit generations to come, but at the same time, being cognizant of the impact on Mother Earth; and making sure that we have respectful relationships with people who share this beautiful province with us.

[2:40 p.m.]

It’s not always easy, nor will it be, but I think we, collectively, are up to the work. I am so, so happy that this throne speech puts people first and is building on the foundation that was laid in the first throne speech. You cannot undo
16 years in one or two years. This is ongoing work, and we're committed to it.

L. Throness: It gives me real pleasure to respond to the Speech from the Throne on behalf of my constituents today. I want to begin by thanking my constituents. It is a great privilege to serve in this place. I always enter this chamber with a sense of awe and thankfulness that I'm able to work hard on their behalf.

I also want to thank my staff. I think of Wendy King, my legislative assistant here in Victoria, who does a terrific job. Coletta Holmes; Sheila Denis; and Kathy Miki — they are foundational to my work. They do a really great job with my constituents. They're great and capable individuals, and I appreciate them very much.

A couple of weeks ago, we had an incredible storm throughout my riding. There were several places where there were floods, and roads were washed out in Columbia Valley. There was a flood in Hemlock Valley. So 1.5 kilometres of road were washed away, and 500 people were trapped up in the Sasquatch Mountain Resort.

Here, I want to thank Brian Murphy. He is president of the Hemlock Valley residents association. Also Shelby Lim and the other staff of Sasquatch Mountain Resort who made sure that the community was pulled together and everyone was fed and housed and safe.

I want to thank Emil Anderson Maintenance, who really deserves a shout-out for repairing that road and bringing it back to passable condition within 2½ or three days, which is really quite an engineering feat. What we really need and I will continue to press for is a proper refit of that road. It's not completely paved, and it's in poor condition because it's just an old logging road. It needs rebuilding, and I want to call on the government once again to do that.

Finally, Rockwell Drive, in the district of Kent just north of Harrison Hot Springs, was flooded as well. I went up there, and it was an enormous amount of damage that was done in a very short time. But again, Emil Anderson Maintenance is working hard to repair it within a few days. I met with constituents there, and they were coping very well.

It was kind of an historic weekend. As disasters go, we got off lightly. No one was hurt. We're grateful that we're able to work hard on their behalf.

Now, I want to speak to the throne speech. One thing that I want to point out — a phrase in the throne speech that we're interested in, the phrase that British Columbians can look forward to more options like "commuter rail out to the Fraser Valley." Well, I mean, that would be great. We're looking for a widening in the No. 1 out to Whatcom Road at least, and if that could be done, we'd be happy for the meantime. I guess my cynical nature would say: "In what decade might commuter rail come to the Fraser Valley?" But we're going to give the government the benefit of the doubt for today, and we're going to be seeking more details on that in short order.

Now, I must say that I was disappointed with the Speech from the Throne and what it said about children and families. I looked at it through the lens of children and families because of my role as critic in that area. Mostly, the throne speech had a lot of partisan talk in it, more than a usual throne speech does, and a regurgitation of promises from one or two budgets ago. This is particularly true of about child care, with one exception. I want to point this out, because the throne speech did signal an important and very significant change in direction in the government's child care program. In fact, I regard it as an about-face, a reversal, a full-on back-pedal, even an astonishing turnaround.

I want to set the stage for those remarks by quoting from the 2017 election campaign of the NDP, which said this when they promised universal health care, and I quote right from their platform: "The $10-a-day plan will build a child care system that provides safe care for every child whose family wants or needs it."

Here's what they said in their first budget of 2018 in a document called — and I brought it with me — The Path to Universal Child Care. Here's what it says on page 6 of The Path to Universal Child Care: "The province's plan for early care and learning is to move towards universal child care that is affordable and available for any family that wants or needs it." That's quite telling.

In the Canada–B.C. early learning and child care agreement, which is a federal-provincial document — it's a legal document signed by ministers — the NDP government echoed this exact same language on child care. Here's what it said: "British Columbia committed to implementing a universal child care plan for every child whose family wants or needs it.

They committed to this, to the federal government. But yesterday in the throne speech, they backed away from it. They reversed course. They abandoned the concept of universal child care and broke a key election promise when they said this. I'll quote from the throne speech: "This government brought forward...a universal child care plan, to provide affordable, quality care to every family that needs it." Not "needs or wants" — every family that "needs" it. It's no longer about wanting; it's only about need. And if it's only about need, it's no longer universal. Gone is the idea that any family that wants subsidized child care will be able to get subsidized child care.

It's similar to health care. If you want health care, you don't get it. You only get it if it's medically necessary. Social assistance, disability, autism funding — all of these programs are need-based programs, and now child care is a need-based program too. Those programs are not universal. You can't get health care if you want it; you can only
get it if you need it. The government has thus backed away from one of its most important campaign promises.

Many thousands of families voted for the government because of its promise of universal care for every family that wanted or needed it. It even made that commitment in writing to the federal government, in order to get millions of dollars for child care, and now the NDP have broken faith with all of them — the federal government, parents, voters. Maybe they thought no one would notice, but we noticed here in the opposition, and parents will notice too.

It’s not universal anymore. I guess they found out that it will cost too much. But there are ramifications to this new direction in the throne speech. The first, for me, is to call upon the government to immediately stop giving fee reduction initiative subsidies to millionaires, because right now fee reductions are universal for everyone, whether they need them or not.

In this way, the NDP are right now actually giving to the rich and taking from the poor, because those subsidies are not available to those who are of lower income. This needs to stop. If it’s now on the basis of need and they don’t need it, they shouldn’t get it. I will look forward to this being in the budget next week.

But I suspect that they knew all of this going in. They knew when they drafted their plan, when they drafted their 2018 budget and their platform that they would not be able to afford child care for everyone who wants or needs it, and now they’ve just slipped it in under the noses of the public.

I want to continue by talking about the B.C. child opportunity benefit, which was a feature — the feature, really — in the last budget, in 2019. The throne speech just really reannounced it. It talks about giving $380 million every year to families with children under the age of 18. We support more benefits to families. That’s not a problem with us. But with the NDP, you always have to look at the fine print.

What’s in the fine print? The government says that a family with one child will get $1,600 a year. Add $1,000 a year to that for the second child, and add to that $800 a year for a third and subsequent child. So a three-child family can expect $3,400 a year. It works out to roughly $100 a month per child, or a little less. But you have to read the fine print. This is the maximum that can be given.

At a family income of just $25,000, the amount starts to stop. If it’s now on the basis of need and they don’t need it, they shouldn’t get it. I will look forward to this being in the budget next week.

But let’s realize that in practice, it will not be nearly as generous as what it’s billed to be. Families should not go and add new rooms to their house or take on other expenditures in anticipation of this smaller amount of money.

Now, I want to go back in child care to the budget of 2018 and recall some of the enormous promises the government made for the three-year period. We are now two years into that three-year period, and I want to evaluate a little bit of where we are, according to the promises that they made.

They were going to spend $1.3 billion over three years on child care. They were going to create 24,000 new incremental spaces and supply enough early childhood educators to staff them. They would be a third of the way to our $10-a-day care for every family that needs or wants it. There would be fee reductions for 50,000 families. The affordable child care benefit was going to benefit 86,000 families at the end of that three-year period. And 27,000 families making under $45,000 a year would pay little or nothing for licensed care.

Well, how are the NDP doing? Have they lived up to their grandiose promises? Allow me to address these issues in turn. I want to begin by talking about $10-a-day care, which was arguably the centrepiece of the NDP campaign in 2017.

The first point is that the NDP put together a pilot project, and they used all federal money to fund that pilot project through the B.C.-Canada early learning and child care agreement. A total of $156 million over three years but not a penny of provincial money was committed to $10-a-day care. And to date, not a penny has been spent by the government on $10-a-day care. It’s all federal money.

Nor did they create a single new space in this pilot project. They merely converted 2,500 existing spaces in 53 lucky centres into $10-a-day spaces. Now, this pilot program is supposed to end on March 31, to be followed by an evaluation by Malatest that was supposed to be done at the end of June. But we heard lately that the federal government has renewed the funding anyway, and the pilot project will continue for another year after March 31.

Now, I really don’t think that the government is particularly concerned about the evaluation, whether it’s good or bad, but it should care because the evaluation contract signed by the government is very costly: $2.9 million to evaluate 53 centres, including $462,000 in expenses like travel, meals, accommodation — oh, and gratuities provided to survey participants. Very important.

The government has pledged to be driven by the data. But without any data from the evaluation, the pilot will be renewed without a second thought because the parents who are lucky enough to receive $10-a-day care actually like it, and it would be politically impossible to stop it. Can you imagine the stories if $10-a-day care — what little there is — had ceased altogether on March 31 and a couple of thousand parents were suddenly out in
the cold, denied the $10-a-day care that they’ve become used to in the past year? It was a nightmare political scenario for the government.

In this, the government, as usual, is driven by pure politics rather than by the data, because the data may have suggested a change to $10-a-day care. Maybe it would have suggested $15-a-day care or some other parameter. But no. The same thing is being redone for another year for a bunch of lucky parents. The second year, the same pilot project will feature the same 53 centres, the same parents and the same children. They won the lottery for a second year in a row.

I use the word lottery advisedly. Let me read to you about Lexie’s Little Bears Child Care from a story in the Goldstream News Gazette from Victoria on February 4 of this year. “It’s such a cliché, but it’s like winning the lottery,” said the owner of the daycare. “The families have been over the moon with this pilot project. Everyone wants a piece of it.” And why wouldn’t they? That’s hardly a surprise.

As in any lottery, we hear the shouts of joy from the few parents who win, but we don’t hear the sighs of the thousands and thousands of parents who lost.

Well, the government gave itself ten years to institute $10-a-day care. Two years in, how is the NDP progressing? Well, the pilot program funds 2,500 spaces. That represents exactly 2 percent of existing child care spaces. That’s it. Rather than coming close to a third of all child care spaces being $10-a-day, the government has 98 percent to go. Well, let the bells ring out and the banners fly.

The minister will argue that many more people than those in the pilot project are paying $200 a month or less. This from a press release from MCFD, dated November 12, where it stated that more than 20,000 families are receiving child care for $10-a-day or less.

[2:55 p.m.]

In question period in that same month, last November, the minister said more than 21,000. But the Globe and Mail, in an editorial on January 12, claimed that there were 22,000 paying less than $200 a month when the B.C. Liberals left power. In other words, the NDP may not have moved the dial at all on that. They just slapped a different name on B.C. Liberal programs that accomplished the same thing.

What was the cost of the pilot project? We have the benefit of a progress report on year two of the B.C.-Canada early learning and child care agreement that was made public with little fanfare about a month ago. From this, we learned that $18.5 million in federal funds were spent in one year. That’s about $600 a space. Add to that the fee reductions, child care operating funds, affordable child care benefits, special grants to the pilot centres called quality improvement grants to bring daycares up to the $10-a-day standards, whatever those standards are. It’s not been evaluated yet, but, apparently, we know what the standards are. I have no doubt that the total is far above the average cost of a child care space in B.C., which is $1,088.

In the end, we don’t know if $10-a-day care will be affordable, and indeed, because universal care was annulled in the throne speech, maybe we have found that it’s not. Maybe it will be $15-a-day or $20-a-day or more. Quebec, after all, started with $5-a-day daycare. Now it’s up to as much as $22 per day, per space.

In brief, we are looking at a very costly program that the province has invested nothing in. The program has accomplished nothing in the way of new spaces. Just 2 percent of our child care spaces are $10-a-day spaces. It’s all politics, and it shows that the government will promise anything to get elected. If they fall flat later on those promises, well, too bad. “We’ll fix it after the election.”

Now I want to talk about a huge problem in child care and that is the supply of qualified early childhood educators. This is the most pressing problem in child care today. I hear about it all the time. I’ve received quite a few emails on this topic. I want to quote from a few because they tear at the heart.

Here’s one I received from the Interior. After pointing out in the email that there are 35,000 qualified ECEs in B.C. who do not work in their field, one provider said this:

“Daily we have panicked parents calling our office because they cannot find child care and have recently accepted a job in our community. Many mothers call our office, and they cannot find child care to return back to work from their maternity leave. I think it’s just a matter of time before we officially begin to call this situation a child care crisis, especially when the business community begins to see the effects of employee absenteeism and they begin to have difficulty recruiting employees to our community for work because parents cannot secure reliable and quality child care.”

How about another from the Interior last March? “It’s been a full year of these contracts and additions from the NDP, and nothing has changed regarding staffing levels. Here’s proof. The daycare that paid the highest wage plus a $500 signing bonus is closing down, because they can’t find staff to work at the end of April.” Wow.

How about this one from the Lower Mainland in an urban centre. I received this just a few months ago, last November. “Hundreds of spaces are allegedly being rolled out and funding provided to build spaces. Yet, there is no staff to work in them!”

The industry is in crisis. Every day I am hearing of centres closing down or desperately struggling, trying to keep their doors open because of the lack of qualified staff. Owners and staff are working ten- to 12-hour days for weeks and months at a time with no break, because they can’t get staff.

“At my centre, we have increased wages by 20 percent over the past year. We have an amazing work environment, a great staff benefits package, including an employer-contribution RRSP program and medical, dental. Yet, we still have a great deal of difficulty finding qualified staff. I can’t even imagine what it must be like for smaller centres.”

The NDP virtually ignored this problem when they launched their program in 2018. Instead, they rushed payments into the hands of parents which created more
demand, but they did virtually nothing about the work-
force needed to staff the spaces that they were funding.
Their plan is only rational when you see the political
rationale to get cheques as fast as possible into the hands
of parents.

In an email I received, this is what a provider said:
“What has happened is that the cart has been put before the
horse. Spaces create votes. There are more parents than
workers. But spaces don’t fix the underlying problems.”
This child care provider eloquently explained the situation.
The government created spaces for political reasons,
without raising up a qualified workforce to staff them.

The government does have a bursary program to help
students, but that ran out of money in October. There were
no more bursaries. They finally found some more money
about a month ago, but in the meantime, some students
had to drop out and lose their semester.

How much has the government spent on the labour sup-
ply? You’d think it would be a lot, since it’s the biggest
problem in the child care field. The government, after all,
is spending $1.3 billion over three years.

On January 17, here’s what an MCFD press release said:
“To date, the province has invested more than $13 million
to provide more than 10,000 early childhood educators
with a $1-per-hour wage enhancement, with another
$1-per-hour lift to come in April 2020.”

Well, whoop-de-do. The NDP is spending $1.3 billion
on child care, and 1 percent of it — $13 million — goes to
alleviate the biggest problem, the dire shortage of workers.
It is a failure of public policy, a triumph of neglect and mis-
management.

Now, I want to move on to talk about the two main
engines of new space creation for this government. They’re
called the new space child care fund and the start-up fund.
Last fall, the government made a big splash. The Premier
visited a child care centre, and there were all sorts of pic-
tures taken. It came out with a major milestone announce-
ment, boasting that it had created 10,400 spaces through
these two programs alone. But then the Minister of State
for Child Care quietly sent out a clarification to the press
that after two years, only 2,055 of those spaces were actu-
ally open and working. In other words, most of those
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The email says this: “I think we can say that there’s a
fairly even split of previously operating versus new start-
up.” So only half the spaces from the start-up fund being
claimed by the government are actually new spaces. The
others aren’t new at all. Because they were operating before
as unlicensed spaces, they’re converted spaces, not created
spaces.

After two years of government doling out millions of
dollars, instead of 2,055 operating spaces out of the 10,400
announced, the real number is about 1,500. Just 14 percent
of the 10,400 spaces claimed to have been created by the
government are new spaces that actually have children in
them. All of this after the government has spent $600 mil-
ion on child care over the past two years.

This is a record of failure that I think is unmatched even
by the NDP government of the 1990s. Surely the minister
should win some sort of prize.

Now, I want to talk about another program that down-
loads provincial responsibilities onto municipalities. This
is a trap that the province is laying for municipalities
around the province. I’m talking about a program man-
aged by the Union of B.C. Municipalities. It’s a provincial
program called the community child care space creation
program. It will spend $13.7 million to create 1,370 new
spaces within municipal facilities. That’s $10,000 a space
just to get them up and running. But the province will
give up to $1 million in funding to municipalities to house
child care centres within municipally owned facilities.

The municipality doesn’t have to pay a dime. The
province will pay the entire shot, up to $1 million, which
I would say is very, very generous. The parameters of the
program are equally generous. Funding can be used to
purchase or construct a building, buy any kind of equip-
ment for it, including vehicles and office equipment and
furniture and play structures. All the physical require-
ments of a daycare will be in place. Then the provider in
the building, which, by the way, has to be a non-profit pro-
vider, will be, in addition, entitled to the full suite of exist-
ing government programs.

My question is simple. Child care is a provincial
responsibility. Why wouldn’t the province do this directly
instead of asking the municipalities to do it for them? It’s
because the province wants to download its responsibility
for child care onto municipalities and municipal taxpay-
ers. They want to push municipalities into providing social
programs in addition to the traditional things like fixing
roads, providing municipal functions like water and sewer.
Let me explain why this is downloading. It takes money to maintain a building and the land around it. The local town would be responsible for that. The municipal building that houses child care won’t be paying property taxes or development cost charges because it’s a municipally owned building, although a commercial business operating on that same property would have to pay all of those things, which is an opportunity cost to taxpayers over the long term.

Municipalities will have to commit to running the facility for up to 15 years. And since it will be a municipally owned centre, if something goes wrong with it, the mayor will take the political hit — not the province. A thousand things can go wrong with a daycare. Maybe for some reason the staff don’t show up one day. If that happens, where will the finger of blame point to? Mayor and council. The mayor and council.

I think it’s very crafty. It’s a very crafty scheme using $1 million at a time to entice municipalities to commit to running those child care centres for up to 15 years, and the minister can wash her hands of it. I hope that municipalities will see through this.

Let’s look at a few other promises. The affordable child care benefit was going to benefit 86,000 families at the end of three years, a year from now. How far are we along? As of last July, which is the latest figure I could find, there were 37,000 families receiving some level of support. The promise is less than half achieved, but we’re two-thirds of the way through the mandate.

The NDP promised fee reductions for 50,000 families. As of last July, about 38,000 families were getting it. There’s still a long ways to go. And 27,000 families making under $45,000 a year would pay little or nothing for licensed care, and the government may actually achieve this one a year from now, although as I have mentioned, the B.C. Liberals were almost there back in 2017 as well. The NDP have done little extra in this regard.

I want to end my speech by comparing the B.C. Liberal record to the NDP record. I go back to government statistics in order to do that, to the MCFD reporting portal. Anybody watching on TV or reading in Hansard can go right to that portal online, and they will find a graph that details space creation since 2004. It shows that over a 13-year period until 2017, B.C. Liberals consistently — year over year, with no interruption — created 3,400 child care spaces or about 44,000 spaces in all. I call this a natural increase. As the population increases and the economy grows, some people want to go into child care, and they take advantage of the programs, and they open up new businesses.

The NDP have continued this natural growth at a reduced rate slightly and little more. With all of their spending and emphasis, they have only accelerated that natural growth by 1,500 working spaces. That’s it. At a massive total cost of $590 million over two years, an amazing amount of money spent to almost no extra incremental effect.

Now, unfortunately, we know little about the government’s overall plan for $10-a-day care. How many spaces does the minister intend to create? How much has it all cost so far? How much will it cost when their plan is complete? How can we know that the program is affordable if we don’t know its parameters? The only figure we have is $1.5 billion a year, and that figure is ten years old.

In closing, B.C. Liberals are proud of what we have accomplished. We not only created 44,000 spaces. We created all-day free kindergarten for five-year-olds, the early learning framework, the child subsidy program, child care operating funds, StrongStart throughout B.C. We are very proud of our achievements, and we will produce our own superior plan in due course.

In the meantime, we’ll be watching closely to ask the tough questions to demand change and improvement in NDP child care policy. [3:10 p.m.]

Hon. D. Donaldson: It’s a great pleasure to rise today and take my turn to respond to the throne speech — not only a pleasure but a privilege — as the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Stikine. I want to thank the people of Stikine, which is the largest geographic constituency in the province and overlays the traditional territories of seven First Nations. I thank them for electing me as their representative here in the Legislature in Victoria for three straight terms.

I’m going to start off this throne speech response by addressing what is on the minds of many Stikine constituents, that being the relationship between the Wet’suwet’en, the province and Canada. Specifically a few constituents have encouraged me to make more frequent public statements regarding Wet’suwet’en circumstances. Although I don’t take up a lot of public space in this discourse on social media, it doesn’t mean that I am silent in the space I was elected to influence in the Legislature in Victoria.

One very recent example of that is the quick response in writing from the Premier yesterday afternoon to Simogyet Spookw, accepting the Gitxsan Hereditary Chiefs’ offer of removing the CN Rail blockade on his traditional territory after a commitment from the provincial and federal governments for a senior official to meet with the Gitxsan and Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chiefs. This demonstrates cooperation towards finding peaceful resolutions before a CN injunction is enforced.

I was disappointed that the Wet’suwet’en Hereditary Chiefs and Minister Scott Fraser were unable to find resolution last week after great effort regarding the Morice West Forest Service Road. I was disturbed, as were many constituents of Stikine, by the images of Matriarchs being removed by the RCMP from their traditional territory.

Rightly, there is separation between the judicial and political branches in our system, and enforcement
decisions are made by the RCMP, not government. Thankfully, no one was injured during the enforcement activities last week.

I'm also hopeful, and that is in part because of the statement from the Wet'suwet'en Chiefs last week that read: “The Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs remain committed to the Wiggins development process and will continue discussions with the province of British Columbia.” A forum for these discussions on Aboriginal rights and title through reconciliation has been taking place since the Baht'las in Witset last February, led for the provincial side by former MP Murray Rankin. I'm glad that work will continue.

As the Supreme Court of Canada Justice Lamer wrote in the 1997 Gisday'wa-Delgamuukw decision, the case and the work ahead is "the reconciliation of the pre-existence of Aboriginal societies with the sovereignty of the Crown." That is what I worked on before becoming an MLA, what I am working on here as an MLA and what I'll continue to work on long after I'm an MLA, as a member of my community.

Now some specifics from the throne speech that are of significance to those living in Stikine. The action plan from the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act will be carried out and created in collaboration with First Nations leaders in the coming months. That will entail outlining what legislation will be analyzed jointly, first using UNDRIP as a human rights framework.

It's going to be a step-by-step, methodical process and a tangible embodiment of Justice Lamer's statement from the Delgamuukw-Gisday'wa case. That would mean "the reconciliation of the pre-existence of Aboriginal societies with the sovereignty of the Crown." That is important work, and as I said — as outlined in the throne speech — that action plan will be undertaken in the coming months.

Health services are of very great importance to those living in the north and living in Stikine. I'm happy to say that as part of the government's work under this throne speech, work will be advancing on a new Mills Memorial Hospital in Terrace. That's a hospital that's used by many people in Stikine. It's the closest major hospital to many residents in Stikine and contains most of the diagnostic and other equipment that's needed. A new Mills Memorial Hospital — work is advancing on that in the next year, as outlined as some of the highlights of the throne speech.

Of course, under this year and under this throne speech, we will see the medical services premium no longer being applied. That can mean a savings to an individual of $900 per year and $1,800 per year per family, on average. That's money directly into people's pockets that they can use in their daily needs and in supporting small businesses in Stikine with their spending.

Housing. There's an amazing amount of work being done on housing on and off reserve in Stikine. This year, under this throne speech, we'll see the undertaking of housing projects — for example, 26 housing units in Witset, on reserve, and $5.2 million being expended from the provincial budget on that housing.

We know that housing on reserve has often been just left up to the federal government. We as a government are stepping up, and I'm very proud of that, in acknowledging that people who have their housing needs met are able to better take control of their own future and be members of society in a healthy way. That's just one aspect that'll be undertaken this year.

We also know that there are affordable housing initiatives in Smithers that we'll see work being done on, affordable seniors housing in Telkwa and, of course, the housing for homeless people in Smithers that was already completed last year. So more to come on the housing front for the north and for Stikine, in particular.

Education. We'll see, under this throne speech and under this year, the breaking of ground of a new Walnut Park Elementary school in Smithers, a $28.5 million project. It'll be able to accommodate up to 440 kids. We know, with that kind of attendance at an elementary school, that the future is bright for the up-and-coming generation in Smithers.

Also, I'm happy to note that provincewide — but of particular interest in Stikine, considering the demographics — the curriculum, K to 12, will now include Indigenous culture and history. Of course, some schools and school districts have been working on this on their own. I know that in the school districts…. I have four school districts in the constituency I represent, many of them taking this work on. Now we'll see that that'll be a provincewide curriculum, which will help immensely.

Very importantly on the education front, we'll see this year 24-7 mental health counselling for all post-secondary school students, a tremendous new improvement. We have a number of students from Stikine attending post-secondary educational institutes in Stikine, with Northwest Community College — which is now called, I believe, the north coast college — as well as those attending post-secondary institutions in faraway cities, whether it's Prince George or down in the Lower Mainland. The 24-7 counselling for those students is such a critical and important part of what's going to be happening, as outlined in the throne speech.

Driving. We know that ICBC was left in a mess. People do have to drive a lot more in the north, compared to
other places in B.C., especially more urban areas. The public transportation options aren’t as diverse. People need to drive to get to appointments, need to drive long distances, sometimes, to get to work and need to drive to get to post-secondary and other institutions.

Generally speaking, we who are lucky enough to have vehicles in the north do tend to put a lot more kilometres on our vehicles, compared to other places. To see that announcement in the throne speech and the work under this government of taking costly legal fees out of the ICBC system will lead to an average decrease of 20 percent in basic coverage. That could be an average of $400 taken off people’s insurance at basic coverage.

That is something that’s going to be very important to people living in the north. As I said, we depend on our vehicles a lot more frequently than others. That will be something that people will enjoy as they’re driving to work, as their rates are decreased, and as they drive to work.

Those working at minimum-wage jobs will be seeing, as outlined in the throne speech, their minimum-wage increase to $15.20 by 2021, up from $14.60 now. So not only will people who can afford a car be able to get less costly, at least, insurance, they’ll also be able to be making more at their minimum-wage jobs.

I want to touch a little bit on the land base — the land base including the oceans. We reached an agreement last year, at least in 2018, on fish farms and the moving of and closing down of open-net salmon fish farms in the Broughton Archipelago. Some people said that agreement could never have been achieved. We managed to achieve it between First Nations, between the government and with industry involvement.

We’ll be seeing those fish farms being moved out of those migration routes and corridors in the Broughton Archipelago. And we will also see that any new fish farms will require not only the federal government to approve. And provincial government approval will be dependent on those fish farms getting the consent of the First Nations where those fish farms will be located. So it brings more certainty to the industry.

We know that many people depend on those fish-farming jobs in some communities. So this agreement will bring more certainty, but it’s also about protecting wild salmon. We know how important wild salmon is to the economy and also the culture in places like Stikine. Again, protecting the wild salmon economy is a priority for this government. By taking action on fish farms, we’ll ensure that not only commercial fish-farming operations remain viable into the future, creating that certainty, but that the wild salmon populations will be further protected.

This is important to people in Stikine. It’s not only important for food and social and ceremonial purposes with First Nations but important for the ecosystem, for the biomass that returns each year and important for people who have livelihoods depending on the sport-fishing industry. That is something that’s extremely important on the Bulkley, the Skeena systems and important for people who have this as a recreational outlet.

There have been a lot of restrictions on sport fishing and restrictions on the inland commercial fishery carried out by First Nations who have in successive years been willing to forego that activity in order to conserve salmon species. So salmon, as I said, is a priority for this government.

Of course, speaking of the economy and environmental and ecological sustainability, I want to touch on forestry. It’s an important part of the ministry I represent, an important part of the economy still in Stikine and across the north. We are dealing with the situation that was left to us by the previous government.

I just want to outline some of those trends. We knew — on the coast, for instance — that between 2003 and 2017, the lumber production on the coast decreased by 45 percent. The employment in the forest sector decreased by 40 percent. The export of logs increased by 155 percent.

Those are trajectories that communities, that workers, that people dependent on forestry found unacceptable, and we did as well. So we’ve taken action on that through our coast forest sector renewal process. We’ve implemented measures to drive more logs to domestic production and increase the amount of fibre being brought out of the forest that was previously left behind. That’ll create more jobs. It’ll create more certainty for communities, and it will address those negative trends over time.

We also understand and know the situation that was left to us with the Interior forest sector. Everybody knew that there was an overcapacity in that sector. Mills’ capacity had increased due to the availability of the mountain pine beetle wood. That wood was predicted, long ago, to come to an end. In fact, the previous government had a report on their hands, in 2015, that outlined that up to 13 mills would be closing. Unfortunately, no significant action was taken to prepare communities for that eventuality.

So we have undertaken the Interior forest sector renewal process. We have seen mill curtailments and closures, and it’s been extremely tough on workers and remote rural and rural communities in the north and in the Interior. We introduced the Interior forestry worker support program in September — $69 million program — but we’re also soliciting and have finished a public engagement process with over 30 communities in the Interior and with experts in the field to come up with some policy initiatives. We’ll be publishing a “What we heard” document shortly on that as a next step for policy suggestions from the ground up in order to address the overcapacity issue and the future of milling in the Interior.

We’ve addressed stumpage concerns not by political intervention in the stumpage system but by the routine measures that we have to recalibrate stumpage that comes year to year. The political intervention in the
stumpage system that some were advocating for would create more harm than good. That’s been borne out by previous situations with the softwood lumber disagreement with the States.

We can’t be seen to be politically intervening in the stumpage system, but simply through our routine measures and adjustments around the different factors that go into creating the stumpage, we have seen, on the coast, a 53 percent decrease in stumpage from January 2019 to this January 2020. So the average stumpage on the coast has dropped from $18.73 a cubic metre to $8.82. Those numbers will continue. We’ve seen a 19 percent decrease in stumpage in the Interior.

We are aware that industry is facing some difficult challenges with the global conditions and the market conditions. We have taken steps to make B.C. more competitive and create some short-term and longer-term policy initiatives for industry. We’ve introduced alternate scaling methods, which become a more cost-effective method for removing logs for lumber and for secondary products.

[S. Gibson in the chair.]

We’ve lowered the maximum log export fee-in-lieu on new BCTS licences from 50 percent to 35 percent, and we’ve paused further implementation of that fee-in-lieu on other timber sales for another six months while we collect the data from the BCTS sales to ensure that the intended objectives are being met. We’ve modified the coast stumpage system, as I talked about, to make it mostly lumber based. We’ve refined our fibre recovery zones and reduced them in size by 21 percent.

Those are some of the things that… We’re taking steps regarding the competitive aspect of the industry.

[3:30 p.m.]

I want to finish off on forestry by talking about some of the changes that we’ve made and will be making, as outlined in this throne speech, to reposition government as the land manager when it comes to the forestry resource. The forests are, first and foremost, there to benefit the people of B.C. and the communities that are nearby. We’re determined to do that with changes we have made to the Forest and Range Practices Act and will be further making to the Forest and Range Practices Act to increase transparency and to, as I said, reposition government as the land manager in a more purposeful way.

We have taken large steps with First Nations. We just signed the Carrier-Sekani comprehensive reconciliation agreement to ensure…. It’s mainly an economic development agreement. I want to give credit where credit’s due. The work was started under the previous government, and we took that initial work and made further progress with the Carrier-Sekani. As I said, it’s mainly an economic development agreement, and it will position the Carrier-Sekani at the table in a much better way for them to be able to come to business-to-business deals with licence holders and to create more plans around the forests within their communities. Again, that’s in the north, very close to the constituency I represent.

In the constituency I represent, I have to point out the Gitanyow land use plan that was signed under the previous government as an example of how we need to move forward with First Nations in creating these kinds of land use plans. The Gitanyow Hereditary Chief Malii has pointed out that a rigorous, well-thought-out partnership around a land use plan really is the essence of free, prior and informed consent. If you have a First Nation and the province coming together and deciding on what activities should occur where on the land base, then that presents certainty for licensed activities by the province in conjunction with the First Nation.

So looking forward to more land use planning work in the coming year under the throne speech and as addressed in the throne speech. Again, that was part of our government’s mandate back when we became government in July of 2017: to undertake a three-year land use planning process. That work will continue more rigorously in this upcoming year as outlined in the throne speech.

Those are some of the highlights from the throne speech that will really make a difference for people in Stikine around affordability, around services and around a sustainable economy. Our government is making different choices, choices that put people first, especially, as I said, in the area that I’m responsible for, in forestry — putting people first in repositioning the government as the land manager, and that forests, first and foremost, should support people and communities ahead of everything else.

We’ve come a long way in 2½ years, but our job isn’t done. We’ll continue to make life more affordable, deliver better services that people can count on and build a strong, sustainable economy for everyone. I look forward to this work and continuing to serve the people of this province. It’s an honour to be able to take my place in responding to the throne speech today. I look so much forward to the work ahead this session and in the coming years.

Deputy Speaker: I now recognize the member for Langley East.

R. Coleman: Well, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and welcome to the chair.

I’d like to start out…. You never know when you might want leave during a session. Complimenting the MLA for Vernon-Monashee and his staff member, Kevin, who are doing an unbelievably good job in the Whip’s office…. You never know when you might need leave, right?

[3:35 p.m.]

Throne speeches have different moments and twists to them. At the beginning of every throne speech over the last 24 years — there have been more than 24 throne speeches that I’ve sat through — we recognize British Columbians we lost in the last year. In my particular com-
munity, it's been a tough year. It's been a tough year in my political family, not the political family from a riding association perspective but actually from the position of families who have served in public life.

Recently we had the celebration of life for Debbie Froese. Debbie Froese was the wife of my mayor, Jack Froese. Debbie was one of those people that brought joy and light into a room whenever Jack and Debbie attended an event or sat down and talked to you because she was just one of those wonderful people who care a lot. Losing her to cancer was a great loss to the Froese family but also to my community.

Last year in January, February, my Member of Parliament, Mark Warawa, who had served when he was the MP for 15 years, announced he was going to retire. Within 60 days, Mark was sick, and Mark died. We thought, at Easter of last year when they said they thought they had isolated it and he was going to be fine, that we had a miracle on our hands. By June, July, we lost Mark. Mark — and his family, who are now rebuilding their life without him — was a wonderful father and grandfather and a phenomenal husband.

Last summer a friend of mine who I actually was involved in running a campaign for, back for council, a guy named Dean Drysdale, passed away with ALS. Dean had run for the federal election, the previous one to this one, for the Conservative Party of Canada. That was three in just a short period of time, and there are others.

On the flip side of all of these people going way before their time, a couple weeks ago a friend of mine, Dorscie Paterson, celebrated her 107th birthday. And Dorscie is still with it. Now, she does have one request. The request would be of the Minister of Housing and the Minister of Health — because the funding was put in place when I was a Minister of Housing — to get whatever block is in the way of building the freestanding hospice on the land that's already owned by the hospice and get on with constructing it.

Because Dorscie has bought a new pair of boots. She's got that pair of boots so that she can actually go to the sod-turning and push it down into the dirt and break the ground on the hospice. Why is it important to Dorscie? Because Dorscie was on the first board and served on the foundation of the hospice society for over 40 years. She was on the first board of the hospice founding board over 50 years ago. So let's remember that we've got to get that sod-turning done for Dorscie.

Now, I've been here 24 years. On Tuesday of this week was the first time in that 24-year period, no matter what the protests were on the premises, no matter what activities were on these premises, that somebody tried to deny me access, as an elected member of this Legislature, to this building. It was shameful. Somebody didn't do their job. Somebody knew that that was on the front steps. Somebody knew that this could happen, and somebody needed to have the injunctive work done so that somebody could be able to handle it on behalf of us with police and security of this building. I don't want to point any fingers. I'm just saying that somebody should have been ready.

As I sat in my office in the afternoon on Tuesday, I watched one of the most shameful things I've watched in a long time. These folks that are in this chamber with us today in their blue blazers and their grey slacks, the folks that are upstairs, the folks that are out in the hallways that actually secure and serve us here every day, left work. They walked down the sidewalk outside my office being taunted and sworn at and yelled at and drummed on because they showed up for work that day. They'd done nothing to anybody out there.

[3:40 p.m.]

For me, personally, although I did post this, I want to tell you how much we value you, how much we appreciate the job you do, and how important you are to the success of democracy in this province. What happened for you on that day was shameful, and I personally apologize to you for it.

Now, let's talk about the protests for a second. I've read the stories of people asking young people why they were out there and what they were protesting, and they didn't seem to actually know what they were here for. But I can tell you this: the professional organizers that were out there had it together. They had maps of the building. They had pictures of the MLAs so they could point it out to the protesters when one of us would either enter or exit the building. They knew where all the exits were, and they were prepared to move their people around.

The thing they don't know, or don't want to know, is that there are 20 First Nations, I believe, along that pipeline route. All of them — all of them — have signed onto benefit agreements. They've signed onto training. Young people in their communities are being trained today for jobs and for the future, to lift them out of poverty, to have a future for their communities and for themselves and their families.

In the whole issue in and around this, when you hear on the national news, "We're here for the Wet'suwet'en Hereditary Chiefs," you're not there for all of them, because there are a number of them that actually support the project as well. To think you should go and blockade a railway and take out thousands of jobs in eastern Canada on the back of something you know nothing about and not understanding that the folks support that pipeline and the jobs and the future opportunities out there....

I know this because I negotiated a lot of those benefit agreements. I've looked at the people. I've met them eye to eye in those communities and seen the hope and love that they have for their community but also seeing what they see as a vision for their communities in the north. When you see that, you know how important it is.

Sometimes people don't understand the perspective relative to First Nations. If you haven't been to a little Indian village 25 miles out of the sight of a community on a gravel
road that has no store, that has no access other than a gravel road, and seen what they want to lift themselves up for by having opportunities in their region of the province, you have no right to attack them, to insult them or to think that you can speak for them. They’re quite capable of speaking for themselves.

They’re also quite capable, as I found, in negotiating for themselves because they’re not an easy bargain. They are informed. They know what they want, and they now want for the future.

As the next protester goes out, I'd like them to think about some little things about First Nations. Little things. For instance, if you want to get a driver's licence in this province, you need to have picture ID. You also have to know whether you need to have corrective lenses, whether you've had an eye test, in order to get a driver's licence.

Do you know that in Haida Gwaii, an optometrist goes, I am told, twice a year, and there's a long waiting list? Do you know that in northern B.C., there are no driving schools? Do you know that for somebody who's 25 miles out of a community and who wants to be able to go in and get a driver's licence, they first need to get an eye test, which isn't available to them? They need to have ID, which is hard to get when you live 25 miles outside of a community where there are any services. And do you know there's nowhere to learn to drive?

Imagine that. We take it for granted. I looked today. There's a licencing place for driver's licences not very far from here. We could walk there in probably less than ten minutes. Some of these guys have to take a water taxi or get a ride into town, like you would have to from Lax Kw'alaams village, up north of Prince Rupert, simply because there's a road to Tuck Inlet but then you have to get on a ferry to get to Prince Rupert. If you can't make your connections, you can't get home that night.

I sat down with a lady yesterday who has actually started a program in northern B.C. She's managed, so far, to get over 200 people their driver's licences. Remarkable. Her name is Lucy Sager.

Interjection.

R. Coleman: The member across says she did run for the leadership of my party, but this is not a partisan project for her at all. After she decided to move on to where she is, she found a passion. The passion is to help those people in her area of B.C. that are less fortunate.

So what are we going to do? Is there a way to get an app that we could actually give somebody an eye test electronically without having to go through it? I saw something recently where, in England, you can now get an ultrasound with a little instrument attached to an iPhone. Surely to goodness we can find a way for people to get their eye tests, their ID and some training to get a driver's licence.

Did you know the next step that comes from that? The ability to go to work or go to training so you can get those jobs that are going to come from economic development and actually have an opportunity for you to change your life.

An interesting story I was told. There was a teacher — I think it was in Smithers, actually; the member might know — who actually took her entire class to get their eyes tested to make sure they could see the blackboard or read what they're reading but also to get eye tests. We need more of that retail approach to people in places in remote areas of British Columbia so they can get to where they need to be relative to their futures. Sometimes it's the simplest of things we could do to change a life.

Those folks that are out there standing on some rail line or blocking the Lions Gate Bridge today who live and have a place to go home tonight maybe want to think about those folks that need that pipeline project and the jobs and the economic opportunities so that they can change their lives.

Quit deciding that you think you can speak for them. You cannot. Let the process go through properly and quit getting people that are professional agitators to go out and pretend that they care about those folks when they have no idea of their living standards, their employment opportunities, their economic development opportunities and what they need in order to, frankly, change their lives.

I'm sorry, to the member from Smithers. It was actually Hazelton where it was a teacher that did this.

The budget also spoke about policing — not for much, but it said it was going to invest in rural policing. Now, when we see the budget, we'll see the number, but I'm hearing it's about $4.5 million. Let me talk to you about policing in British Columbia from a number of perspectives.

First of all, when I became the Solicitor General in 2001, I found out that the RCMP in British Columbia's balance was being budgeted by vacancies. There were over 100 police officers short in rural British Columbia at that time under the previous NDP government. Not only did we put the money in for that, but we raised the complement by another 100 officers the next year.

Today in British Columbia, after 2½ years of the NDP, there are 200 vacancies in rural policing in British Columbia. So rather than think you're going to go into the budget and throw $4 million to $5 million at that, why don't you fund the police officers that are needed today? There are police officers out there today who don't have the backup in rural B.C. or the assistance on other services because you're not funding the police force.

You need to fund the RCMP for the positions that you say are already in the contract and in the complement in British Columbia's rural areas. When you do that, then talk about what you'll do to enhance rural policing. The challenge....

Policing is going to go through some interesting shifts in the next year or so, and we'll find out what that is in
the next little while. We are awaiting.... I would imagine
the Solicitor General and certainly the director of police
services may have or are awaiting the report from former
judge Wally Oppal, who is making an assessment of, basic-
ally, the idea for rural policing, or actually city police
change in the city of Surrey.

[3:50 p.m.]

Before I jump to there, because I’m going to touch on
policing, I want to also mention a story on the side of
driver’s licences for First Nations communities. Changes
have been made that say you have to have insurance and
licensing now for off-road vehicles. When we made that
decision, it was right to, actually, really take control on the
theft of off-road vehicles, etc.

Folks driving an off-road vehicle can get a ticket and get
points, even if they don’t have a driver’s licence. I recently
found out that a number of First Nations individuals who
are actually trying to qualify for their driver’s licence....
When they went to get it, they found out they had fines
from off-road vehicles on their territories for driving a
quad or a snowmobile.

Mainly, it’s conservation officers that ticket them, and
they have a fine they have to pay before they can get their
driver’s licence. It’s something I would recommend to the
Minister of Aboriginal Relations to take a hard look at and
find out how we can get through that kind of silliness for
the reason for these same people.

It’s a bit of education, probably, for our rural policing
and also for our conservation officers, relative to where
they can drive an ORV. On their land, on territorial lands
— where is it allowed? Right now, there seems to be some
confusion out there.

We all know that the city of Surrey unanimously
decided, as a council, that they wanted to change their
police force about a year and a half ago. We now know
that the government has done the right thing here, say-
ing: “We’ll go out to an independent person, ask for an
analysis, recommendations, on how to transition that
police force and make sure of that expertise on things as
we go forward.”

Now, I’m not going to give you an opinion of that piece
today, but I do think we need to recognize that policing is
integrated and needs to be integrated all the time. We are
today, still, if you can imagine, the only jurisdiction on the
North American continent — I’ll say that again: the only
jurisdiction on the North American continent — where
every police officer, police car and technology is on the
same platform in real time. It’s called PRIME.

As we go forward with whatever changes take place in
policing, remember this. Technology, integration and the
integration of information and work will be the key to
modern policing for decades to come. It doesn’t matter
what the uniform is of the officer on the street as long as
the information management and the response is integ-
rated. There are no gaps for anything to fall through. If we
do that, and we continue with what we’re doing with integ-
rated teams, integrated homicide teams, with a high solve
rate — because you have your expertise, and you build it
for all police forces together — you’ll be successful.

But I think as we come through this discussion, the
important thing is to also understand something else.
Technology can be an asset to law enforcement. In areas
of the world today, an officer gets out of his car, and he
has what they call a camera, right? They have a body
cam. Most people think that is for protection of them
and the decisions they make, which it is. But in some
jurisdictions, they’ve gone further, and they now use
artificial intelligence.

Now an officer can get out at the scene and start talking
about what they see — if it’s a car accident, where the
two cars are, what the injuries are, all of those things.
Talk to witnesses, and everything is being recorded on the
camera. But the AI is also typing up the statements and
observations of the officer and the witnesses at the crime
scene, which removes a huge amount of administration for
police officers. They can be more efficient. It also makes for
stronger evidence, because it’s real-time observation by the
people and the witnesses.

We need to make sure as we go through this, however
they go after the report.... Recognize that this may be
a great opportunity for British Columbia. I think that’s
important. I’m not afraid of it either way. I think that
sometimes you have to change to innovate. The people
of Surrey will get to make that decision, not us. The Soli-
citor General will take the report from Mr. Oppal and
make the decision.

[3:55 p.m.]

The throne speech didn’t spend a lot of time on
resources, but I want to spend a couple of minutes on a
couple of things. First, I want to talk about forestry just
briefly.

I negotiated, in 2005, the last softwood lumber agree-
ment we had in British Columbia and in Canada. I was
with David Emerson and, at that time, Michael Wilson,
who was our ambassador in New York. To all the ministers
across the country who I went to, I said: “Look, let us lead
this file, because we’ve got the biggest stake in forestry.”
They did, and we were successful.

I just want to say this. If ministers and Premiers are
going to Washington to talk about softwood, our ministers
should be there. We should be there because we’re the big
dog in this fight. They need to know what we want and
where we want to go, because, quite frankly, British Col-
umbia is the largest forest jurisdiction in this country. I
think that they make a mistake by not making sure that
they’re cooperating with the minister and with the Premier
of B.C. when they go to do this.

Secondly, when I was up in Skeena, I had the Skeena
Forest Products guys tell me that the changes in the coast
forests, where we’ve raised the amount of log exports on
the coast, the central and southern coast, is actually killing
their mill. Now, I know we got accused of allowing log
exports, but you increased them, increased them on the coast, and you brought them further south. Now it's affecting those maybe few mills that might survive. Take a second look at that. I think it's important.

Don't waterbed your stumpage like you are in some areas of B.C. right now, where the cost of stumpage is going out, making it completely uncompetitive for a mill to come back on line. Think about that.

Also think about this. We've got too many taxes in this province. I know I'll get a chance during the budget speech to talk about this in more detail, but I got to tell you. If Alberta goes to an 8 percent corporate tax and we're still at a 12 percent corporate tax, watch companies flee their offices to Alberta and still be in business in B.C., because that's a huge gap in the taxes.

Think about the small business. I know I oftentimes hear, even during question period, what you've done for small business. But I can tell you what you've done for two small businesses in my community. You put them on the ropes. One of them employs 25 people. The employer health tax this year will cost that business $30,000. You add that in to the 6 percent increase that they put on the property taxes in that particular community, which flows through the triple-net budget directly to the business, and all the other taxes that have increased, including carbon tax and all of those. You bring them to their knees. You bring them to the point where break-even is tough.

You know what it looks better to do, particularly if you're in something like automotive or something like that, things like air-conditioning or that type of thing…? It says: "I can get 50 bucks an hour by going up and working on the LNG project. Why am I employing 20-some people in this community and barely making a living? I'll shut it down. I'll move on."

You always have to keep in mind that it's not easy to be in business for a small or medium-sized business. You have to meet a payroll. You've got to pay your bank. You've got to pay everybody else before yourself. All of those things are important, and I didn't really hear anything of substance to understanding this when I listened to the throne speech.

Now, in question period today, it was brought up… I think it was a mistake in language by the Minister of Finance, but my colleague from Kamloops brought up the strata insurance issue, where insurance is going up and deductibles are going up, and people are finding these huge surprises. Let's crystallize it down to the person living in a condo in my community, in one building. Their insurance has gone up by over 150 percent. That's for the fire and water and damage, those sorts of things. The stratas all collect moneys to pay for that insurance. The deductible has gone from $5,000 to $250,000.

In this particular building, if you're a senior who is on a fixed income and bought your condo when you downsized from your house, your strata fee is going up by $300 per month next year to cover this problem. That's a hit when you don't have an opportunity to increase, plus the fact that your taxes have gone up. All of these other costs have gone up, including the carbon tax that affects you when you fill up your car or you get your fuel to heat your home.

But how about the young couple I met in my office who is stuck in one of these situations, who bought their first home two years ago? This is only a three-year-old building. They have to pay the $300 more a month, plus a special assessment to pay for this year's insurance, and their bank, their financial institution, has told them because they're a high-ratio mortgage, they have to insure the deductible. So they have to buy additional content to their contents insurance, another policy, to cover the $250,000 deductible.

First of all, it makes it almost impossible, with a high-ratio mortgage, with their incomes, to have anything left at the end of the month to do things, but it also is going to change the housing market dramatically.

The reason I bring it up is because I think it's important that we understand that although the NDP lived through it in the '90s, nobody was complicit in the issue. But the leaky-condo issue was a big challenge for us in the '90s. And I think, right now, in the year 2020, this is potentially another one — affordability, sales, construction and jobs.

The slip that I think the Finance Minister said today, though, is that renters would also pay if this insurance is going up. Not so. I'll tell you what's going to happen. People are going to get out of the rental market, because they can't pass that cost on if they own condos that they rent in a building. They're stuck with it. They'll be better off to sell it and put it into a mutual fund and get out of the market altogether and have no rental left. So it could create a significant crisis on the affordability of housing in British Columbia. We need to be on top of that.

Although it was a first series of questions today, I think we have to understand that we have a problem. It's a private sector insurance problem, but somebody has got to bring the Insurance Bureau of Canada and insurers across Canada together to solve and come up with solutions to this problem. That leadership can come from government, and it can come to us with what's happening with government, because this is not a political issue. This is an issue that is going to affect lives, affect affordability and hurt people's futures.

I often hear them talk about housing on reserve. Just so you know, been there, done it four years ago. First one on reserve was done. Thank you for continuing what we already started. And 114,000 units — at my calculation, it will take you 100 years to do it because you've hardly built anything.

Start to take some leadership on project situations like Oppenheimer Park. Don't let a park board decide to dictate how this thing should go. Put everybody at the table. Find the solutions. To your credit, B.C. Housing and Portland Hotel Society are finally able to get in there to come up with solutions.
Mental health and addictions are going to be an issue we'll talk about for a long time to come.

All of these things are important and can never be put into a 30-minute speech. But I can tell you this. I've got another 30 minutes under the budget in another week or so, so I will continue my thoughts on those issues. To actually set up and deal....

Interjection.

R. Coleman: We don't have designated speakers on the throne speech, but if you want me to....

I just want people to understand that you don't get to speak for First Nations. They can speak for themselves. Don't judge or tell them what to do if you've never been in their communities to understand the pressures and things that they need. Get out of the way and let people build lives, without being from somewhere with an opinion that you don't have any information about.

Hon. G. Heyman: It's an honour to take my place to speak to the Speech from the Throne and to spend a bit of time talking about some of the accomplishments of our government in 2½ relatively short years and delivering on a range of promises to British Columbians as well as meeting the needs of British Columbians for access to services, for affordability, for real action on climate change, for education, for health care. Pent-up demand after many, many years of a government making choices that didn't focus on what people needed, didn't put people and the environment at the centre of decision-making....

I want to begin my remarks, hon. Speaker. I echo the comments of the previous speaker about our appreciation, every member of this House's appreciation, for the staff who work in this building, the staff who assist us in this chamber, the staff who provide security, who were caught in a very disrespectful bite of people who were taking issue with the actions of our government.

I think everybody on both sides of this House have acknowledged that respectful protest is a legitimate part of democracy. Speaking out and demonstrating to support your opinion or to take issue with a government policy is a legitimate part of democracy, and our job as legislators is to not dismiss that but to hear it.

I think the key is respect. The key is not threatening. The key is within the bounds of the law. And to take people who are here to do their jobs to support this institution of democracy and yell at them, keep them from coming in or leaving, to spit on them, to jostle them is wrong. It's simply wrong.

I join all of my colleagues here in saying thank you to everybody for the job you do day in and day out. And it's our — I'm searching for a word here — deep disappointment and regret that people who are not responsible for the policy decisions in this House, who simply support our democracy, were treated with such disrespect, as if they were the authors of the policy with which the demonstrators are taking disagreement. That's wrong. It should stop. We intend for it to stop while, at the same time, recognizing legitimate, respectful, lawful voices of dissent directed at the government, as they should be, as they always have been, in a democracy.

That also takes me, in part, to my constituency of Vancouver-Fairview, which has been an honour for me to represent since 2013. We started in 2013 by treating our constituency office as a community office, building into our office plan a space for community groups to be welcome, to have meetings if they had no other space. We've tried to provide not just advice but access to services, as well as a good place to have a dialogue.

In past years, people have come to my office to protest a variety of things outside, or sometimes they've requested to come in and talk with me. That has happened. It often happened on a very respectful basis, and I continue to welcome that. I continue to think the best way to talk about disagreements is through dialogue and an opportunity to explain, whether as an opposition member of the Legislature talking about our policies as a party, or as a member of government or simply an MLA who takes part in the policy debates in this chamber to talk about our perspective on what we're doing and to hear others' perspective and to bring them back to the debates we have within our caucuses and within this Legislature.

Starting a little over a year ago, the visits and protests clearly took a different edge. While many people continue to be respectful and make their voices heard, we had more than one occasion where people came into the office, occupied the office, refused to leave.

Some people. Not all, but some people were abusive to the constituency staff, whom I think it's important to point out are not ministry staff. They're there to help the community, to service the community. They're not there to be answerable for government policies. But nonetheless, some people simply want to direct their anger at whomever they find. There's a difference between a legitimately expressed emotion, disagreement in political viewpoints, and making people stressed and fearful for their safety.

More recently, as we see more of these.... I have tremendous constituency office staff. Lisa Dekleer, Nadja Komnenic and Nicolas Bragg are the ones who work the most regularly in my office, although there are others who have been in situations where they felt that they had to have a lock on the door to ensure that they knew who was coming in. But we've seen today, in another constituency office, that even that may not be enough.

In some cases, the office is closed for a period of time. We certainly continue to try to address the needs of our constituents who contact us by email or who contact us by phone. But I'm increasingly aware that it's not just wheth-
er there's a threat of an office occupation, or potential violence, or people being trapped in an office because the people who have come there won't leave. It's the stress of thinking about going to work and having that be a possibility. That is not healthy. That is not a safe workplace. It's not a respectful workplace.

As an MLA, we're also employers of the people who work in our offices, and we need to be mindful. We need to be exceptionally mindful of what our staff face on a day-to-day basis and support them. We continue to do that in our own ways. It is regrettable to me that my constituency office, my community office…. That has, for many years, been a place to welcome people to talk about issues, both their own concerns and issues they're dealing with in the community, needing to seek advice or simply coming to ask me: “Why? Why is something happening this way? Why is government doing this?”

My preference is to have an open dialogue. My preference is that people who take dispute with the work I do as an MLA or the work I do as a minister raise that with me in a way that doesn't make people — other people who are simply doing their jobs — fear for their safety. It's not right. It doesn't promote democracy, and it doesn't encourage dialogue. There are better ways to do it, in my opinion. I hope to be able to have my office open again soon, but I will continue to place the safety of my constituency staff first.

That's a bit of a lengthy introduction, but I think it's timely to talk about that, because when we talk about constituency work and constituency staff, we also talk, very importantly, about the people who interface with the citizens we represent. And in many cases, those citizens want to know what we're doing for them.

I think we're doing a lot. I think we've done a lot over the 2½ years we've been in government. We've done that by trying to be open-handed with other members of this House, whether they're in the official opposition or the Third Party, with whom we have a confidence and supply agreement, in trying to build the best possible legislation and programs for British Columbians.

I know from my many, many years of speaking to constituents and going door to door that the issues that are of concern to them arise continually, whether it's access to child care or whether it's affordable housing, particularly affordable rental housing, after a period of years in which there was essentially a great threat, through a variety of loopholes in the Residential Tenancy Act, of double-digit rent increases — sometimes, constituents told me, about 25 percent and, in one case, as high as 35 percent. I know the member for Vancouver–West End once represented people facing a 40 percent rent increase.

These were real issues of affordability for the people. They raised it on the doorstep. They raised it in my office. They raised it in other constituencies. We worked hard to attempt to address that.

On the issue of affordability of housing, we have built more social housing. We are working with the city of Vancouver, as well as municipalities around British Columbia, to build more affordable housing, to reduce and address the factors through legislation that resulted in rampant real estate speculation, in money laundering and in the driving up of home prices at every level.

We know that rental supply is an issue, and we've been working on that. But we also know that providing for fair rents and the ability of landlords to fairly ensure that they can build improvements into their rental units but also guaranteeing renters that they won't be turfed on the street for renovations that don't require them to vacate the premises, or be turfed under the guise of a fixed-term lease because people saw an opportunity to make more money at the expense of housing for people who need it, people who live and work in the community…. I believe we've taken major steps to address those issues. It's reflected in the throne speech, and more is to come.

With respect to child care, in the 2½ years we've been in government, in my constituency of Vancouver-Fairview, we have put over $5.7 million into child care, and over $3 million has been devoted directly to families. We've created 69 new child care spaces in my constituency, and that does not include the additional child care spaces that will be created as a result of our memorandum of understanding with the city of Vancouver.

These are important, meaningful changes for British Columbians every day, British Columbians struggling with affordability, British Columbians who want to use their skills, talent and ability without worrying about whether they have a roof over their heads or whether they can continue to afford to live in the community near where they work, which is important to people. If you don't have to spend unnecessary periods of time commuting…. That goes to both the ability to live in the community in which you work or the availability of public transit, both of which we're addressing.

I've talked about housing. I've talked about social housing. But we're also investing heavily in public transit. We're investing heavily by cooperating with the mayors, instead of constantly disagreeing with them, so that people can move around Metro Vancouver and in the community of Vancouver-Fairview easily and in a timely manner, so they can spend more time with their families.

Every young family I met with on the doorstep in any election and between elections raised the issue of child care, raised the availability of child care spaces, so they could go to work knowing their children were being cared for by trained, qualified early childhood educators in safe surroundings. The number of people who have spoken to me about their desperation and not being able to access quality child care is too great to number.

While there is much, much more to do, we have done so much. The Minister of State for Child Care has been
a superstar in working on this issue — reaching out to parents, to educators and to communities to identify a way forward to fill the needs that have been there for far too long.

It’s not just families that benefit from investments in child care. It’s our economy as a whole. More than one study by a central bank in Canada has identified that for every dollar we invest in child care, we provide the ability to get a greater return on investment, much more than that single dollar, in terms of economic development and productivity.

[4:20 p.m.]

And of course, we lift people up when we make it easier for them to work, to go to school, to learn, to get the jobs that match their talents and to fill the skill needs of B.C.’s industries that continue to grow.

Education is critically important. We have taken steps to support students in a number of ways. The Minister of Advanced Education has been focusing on adding new programs to post-secondary education to meet the skills needs of the technology sector, as well as a whole bunch of skilled trades jobs that are needed to change our economy and our energy use to fit into our CleanBC plan to meet the challenge of climate change.

We can’t fill the jobs in the new economy if we don’t train people, unless we simply look elsewhere. While we will always welcome immigrants, and we will always try to fill the jobs that British Columbia industries and companies have and that need filling, our preference — and all of our preferences, I think — is to ensure that young people, as well as people in midcareer, get the training they need to productively fill the jobs of today and the jobs of an evolving and emerging economy.

Whether it’s eliminating interest on student loans, adding the programs that people need or ensuring that First Nations youth, as well as new immigrants and former youth in care, can access the range of educational programs — post-secondary education, English as a second language or skills training — they can do that in an affordable manner and, in many cases, for people who need it the most, without onerous tuition fees that keep them from realizing their full potential.

It’s not only fair. It’s not only what people want. It’s not only putting people at the centre of our policy decision-making with respect to education. It’s also good for our economy. It’s good for social harmony and social equity. It’s good for reconciliation. In fact, it’s a critical part of reconciliation with Indigenous people in British Columbia.

We can’t give meaning to our efforts to pursue reconciliation or the declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples if we don’t ensure that a huge part of that is recognizing economic opportunity for Indigenous peoples, economic opportunity that meets their goals and their aspirations, ensuring that Indigenous youth have opportunity and the education to access that opportunity.

Let me close my comments — there’s so much that we’ve done in British Columbia in 2½ years, yet there’s so much more to do — to talk about a critical issue for all of us in moving into the future: the issue of climate change.

You can’t talk about climate and emission reductions without talking about transforming our economy and ensuring that people are at the centre of our actions, that we make life affordable, that we make it possible for people to make the shifts in their lifestyles that lead to lower energy use for home heating, more effective and less energy-intensive transportation.

Whether it’s public transit, hybrid vehicles or electric vehicles, or ensuring that the industries in which they now work and which are a huge part of our economy — the resource sector — get the support they need to reduce their energy intensity and carbon emissions, which will ultimately make them more profitable, CleanBC is a plan to do all of that.

It’s a plan that has significant emission reductions, modelled on our way to our 2030 targets. We’re working hard to flesh out the full range to reach 100 percent of our 2030 targets, as well as beginning now to put in place the measures that will help us reach our 2040 and 2050 targets, whether it is investing in public transit or investing in setting regulatory targets for zero-emission vehicles.

[4:25 p.m.]

Working with the Business Council of B.C. and with individual industries on a low-carbon industrial strategy that assists our carbon-intensive industries that rely on trade for their products to protect themselves from jurisdictions that are not taking steps on emission reduction and do not have a carbon price, we need to ensure that our industries both reduce emissions and remain competitive.

We’re committed to working with industry to do that, both to reduce emissions and also to develop an ongoing strategy that the business council and our government is pursuing through a memorandum of understanding to ensure that we take the low-carbon advantage in British Columbia and use it to market our technologies that help reduce emissions and our products — many of which are among the least carbon-intensive in the world. There’s a growing market for these products. There’s a growing awareness of the need for these products, as other jurisdictions begin to grapple with the challenge of climate change.

When I have the honour of attending international conferences, whether they’re here in Vancouver, like the GLOBE conference that was happening this week, or whether it’s at the UN Climate Week in New York or conferences that happen annually, people grapple with how we can work together across the economy and across governments at every level of government — national, subnational, provincial and state and municipal.

People are interested in the measures that we have taken in British Columbia. People are interested in the measures that began with the previous government, like the carbon
tax, and they’re also interested in the evolution of our climate plan that we have defined in CleanBC. They’re excited about it. They’re particularly excited about it when I outline for them the measures that we’re taking while, at the same time, having consistently the lowest unemployment rate in Canada and one of the highest levels of economic activity.

The single best thing we can do to ensure that we have meaningful climate action across Canada and across the world is to do our part in British Columbia and to be a good model for other jurisdictions.

We can get rid of this false dichotomy between jobs, the economy and the environment and understand that a healthy, sustainable economy and healthy, sustainable communities are completely dependent on our respect for the natural environment in which we live, our respect for our impact on the environment when we extract and process resources, and our respect for our children, our grandchildren, their children and their grandchildren when we do put in place plans to reduce emissions — as science tells us we must — to ensure that we don’t leave a planet in which all of our resources, all of our economy is focused on mitigating the impacts that could have been avoidable — the impacts of climate change, whether it’s drought, wildfire or flooding.

I’m excited about our environmental initiatives. I’m excited that we revitalized our Environmental Assessment Act to include respect for and implementation of the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples. I’m excited that at the core of our Environmental Assessment Act is collaboration with Indigenous people from the very start of every project proposal — not only because it’s respectful, not only because it advances the principles of the UN declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples but because it will lead to greater certainty for project proponents, for investors and for Indigenous communities themselves, who will be part of the development of these projects and will get benefits from these projects.

It will ensure that their concerns are built into the project design — not because they had to go to court to establish that after the fact, after a company is heavily invested in the millions of dollars in a plan that was developed without knowledge of the concerns of communities or of Indigenous people, but because they heard about it from the very beginning and were able to design a project that could achieve consensus and consent. It’s an exciting prospect. It’s part of what we’ve done to help develop B.C.’s economy in a more collaborative way, in a way that’s respectful of communities and Indigenous people.

I’m proud of that achievement of our government. The act was brought into effect in December. The first projects are now entering the new system, and we’re determined to work with Indigenous people in communities across British Columbia to ensure that the new act accomplishes its purpose — respect, reconciliation, greater certainty and good, responsible economic development in British Columbia.

Let me simply close by making mention of one of our commitments in the throne speech. We are indeed following a consultation and a white paper on plastics pollution and what we can do as British Columbians to address it.

[R. Chouhan in the chair.]

We know it’s top of mind for British Columbians. We consulted broadly over the summer, both on consumer plastic use as well as marine debris, which was being handled by the Parliamentary Secretary for the Environment in a separate consultation.

We had the third-highest response of any surveying we’ve done of British Columbians, with this plastics consultation. People are concerned about the impact of plastics on our environment. They’re concerned about the waste. They’re concerned about it getting into the ocean. They know there’s a better way. They had great ideas.

I’m going to be very proud, in a matter of weeks, to talk about what our response to what we heard will be, what our response to support the municipalities that have already consulted with their citizens and were determined to take action will be, what our response will be to work with suppliers, distributors and businesses on a plan that can really make a difference in how we use these products and reduce the use of waste in British Columbia to meet what people have told us they want, and that’s a more plastic-free society.

There are alternatives. We want to ensure that we phase them in with full consultation in a realistic manner. We will be talking about that in a few weeks. I think British Columbians will like what they hear. I think they will recognize in what they hear a direct response to the issues that they raised with us.

Our CleanBC plastics strategy will contribute tremendously to British Columbians’ desire to reduce waste and pollution and to take another step forward together to build a better, more sustainable British Columbia.

In sum, the throne speech speaks to what we will do in the future and what we’ll continue to do on the programs that we’ve begun in the 2½ years that we’ve governed through the confidence and supply agreement with the Third Party. It celebrates the accomplishments we’ve made to put British Columbians at the centre of our decision-making, to focus on a cleaner, more sustainable future, to focus on affordability and to focus on giving people the services that they need while building a strong, diversified, stable, modern economy.

N. Simons: On behalf of the Solicitor General, I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.
Introductions by Members

N. Simons: I appreciate the leave granted to make this introduction on behalf of the Solicitor General.

Visiting the Solicitor General today is the Chief of the Williams Lake Indian Band, Chief Willie Sellers, joined by Aaron Mannella, their new CAO. They are meeting with the Solicitor General, in this chamber. Of course, the Williams Lake Band is part of the Secwépemc Nation. I'd like to welcome them to the precinct.

Debate Continued

S. Furstenau: I want to welcome back my colleagues and friends to the chamber.

Before I begin today, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the opening of the session — it's the first in a new decade — as well as the incredible people who make our work possible: the Legislative Assembly team, public servants, Legislative Protective Services officers, the chamber assistants, the constituency assistants and the press gallery. Thank you for your service to British Columbia.

I also want to take a moment to thank the families and partners of every member of this House. This job demands a lot and takes many of us far away from home for much of spring and fall.

I know it wouldn't be possible without the support and encouragement from our loved ones, especially their willingness to shoulder more of the responsibility for caring for our kids and elders while we are away. I recognize and appreciate their role in our work. Thank you.

I also want to recognize the exceptional team we have in the B.C. Green caucus office: Evan, Claire, Sarah, Macon, Kaylea and Judy. It is a joy to work with all of you and a marvel to witness your abilities to juggle so many files and tasks and at the same time produce the high-quality work that you always deliver.

In my constituency office, I owe everything to the dream team: Maeve, Tricia, B., Kayla, Aaron, Mariana, Pat, Shelby, Jolene, Jessica and the best window washer in Duncan, Peter.

I appreciate this opportunity to respond to the throne speech. I think that we must start with recognizing there is an important connection between this Speech from the Throne and the escalating public action we see in our streets and on the lawns of this very Legislature.

The disruptions here in B.C. and across Canada are not disconnected from the decision-makers who appear to be ignoring the evidence that we need urgent and transformative action and who instead present a backward-looking vision at a time when we need to lean into acknowledging the very significant challenges that we face and at the same time take big, transformative steps that are required of us.

I studied history at UVic for many years, earning my BA and MA looking back at societies that existed hundreds and hundreds of years ago. It is important that we look to history to understand how we have gotten here, to understand the patterns of human behaviour, to recognize the cycles that repeat themselves over and over again.

It is the work of historians to look backwards. It is the work of elected officials to look forward, to recognize that when we make decisions in chambers like this, we are shaping the future. It is our job to recognize that we owe a debt to future generations and that we have no right to hand them a degraded version of the world from the one that we inherited from our parents and their parents.

It is not enough to make life more affordable. We need to make our economy more sustainable. We need to make our communities and our province more resilient, more secure and healthier. We need to recognize that we are in a time of enormous transition. Our work should be rooted in ensuring that the transition brings greater equality and greater well-being to the people of B.C., rather than pretending or wishing that that transition is not happening.

The future of B.C.'s economy does not lie in the fossil fuel industry. Around the world, investment firms, banks, corporations and countries are looking to the future and divesting from fossil fuels. This is not the time for a government to double down on a terrible bet. It's a time for government to begin to make the choices to shape the future that will ensure that our children and their children can enjoy a safer, more resilient place to live.

As my colleague from Saanich North and the Islands said yesterday, it is hard not to feel that government's remarks were overshadowed by the events that unfolded around the Legislature this week. Yes, there were a number of policies that were positive that were highlighted, many of them a direct result of collaboration with the B.C. Green caucus. But much of the speech was backward-looking and fell flat in light of what is currently happening in B.C.

Sitting in this quiet chamber after making our way through a crowd of people at the door, it was abundantly clear to me that the inside of this building has lost touch with the frustration, anger and angst swirling outside of this building. This is what it looks like when people begin to lose faith in their institutions. We are brought to a crossroads of tear it down or build it up.

Despite my own frustration, anger and angst, I am here because I believe in something better, and I believe in our opportunity to build it, knowing that the opportunity is now and it is urgent.

To do so, we also need to fully understand the policies and decisions that have led to the current challenges we face and that we are seeing play out across Canada, igniting on the front steps of our Legislature, were neither inevitable nor unavoidable. The stage was set, vote by vote.

Last spring Bill 10, the Income Tax Amendment Act, was put before this House for deliberation and debate. The bill, which detailed the lucrative financial handout that government was offering LNG Canada, was a key
condition of the fossil fuel project's positive final investment decision. Without it, the project would not have gone ahead. The LNG Canada terminal is, of course, the final destination for the Coastal GasLink pipeline.

My B.C. Green colleagues and I used every democratic tool at our disposal to show that this project is the wrong choice for our province. We carried hours of debate on our own. We argued against massively expanding the fossil fuel industry in the midst of a climate crisis. We argued against approving and endorsing the biggest point source of pollution in the province. We argued against subsidizing foreign multinational corporations with a corporate welfare package worth billions of taxpayer dollars. We argued against proceeding with a megaproject that was having Indigenous people dragged off their land before construction even started.

We triggered 14 standing votes, urging our colleagues to stand for more than their party lines. But each time the fossil fuel industry won — 83 in favour, three opposed. Worsening climate change — 83 in favour, three opposed; $6 billion to LNG Canada — 83 in favour, three opposed; massively increasing fracking in British Columbia — 83 in favour, three opposed; disrespecting Indigenous rights and title — 83 in favour, three opposed.

As my colleagues and I were being wrestled into the building by police on Tuesday, the crowd surrounding us were chanting our names and demanding that we stand with them. That was tough, because we did stand. We stood, over and over, to vote no to LNG Canada and Coastal GasLink. We stood, over and over, to ask our 83 colleagues in this building to consider a different path for B.C., a path that does not include a pipeline through the territory of the Wet'suwet'en people.

With their votes, the B.C. NDP and B.C. Liberals chose to barrel ahead, knowing that there were existing, long-standing and unresolved matters relating to rights and title in the area. They knew full well of the matters that needed to be reconciled, at some point since the Supreme Court of Canada ruling in 1997, through good-faith government and government negotiations.

Great efforts are needed to address and reconcile Aboriginal rights and title with the assertion of Crown sovereignty. We cannot ignore or arrest our way out of these challenges. They are complex, they are historic, and they will take time. If Crown governments keep doing whatever they want despite local opposition, we will not be given the time to make that progress.

As lawyer Gavin Smith recently wrote:

"The Wet'suwet'en are a classic example of how the Crown and the Canadian legal system have overseen a long-term and continuing failure to give effect to the promised recognition of Aboriginal title and Indigenous law."

He carries on:

"After millions of dollars spent on some 13 years in court, including 318 days of presenting evidence at trial, the Wet'suwet'en, together with the Gitxsan, won a landmark title victory in the Supreme Court of Canada's 1997 Delgamuukw decision. The court ordered another trial due to the trial judge's improper rejection of important Indigenous evidence, but explicitly encouraged good-faith negotiation rather than further litigation."

He continued:

"More than two decades later it is undeniable that the provincial and federal governments... have not done enough to advance such negotiations."

We cannot now use a narrow interpretation of the rule of law to shield us from the hard work of fair and just governing. Courts in our country have been recognizing Indigenous law as legitimate for decades. Adding to that, B.C.'s newly passed Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act commits everyone to a new model of working together. That should have started the day that it was passed. It may now sound glib to say that much of the work ahead of us will be achieved through good-faith conversations when we know injustice really comes down to shifting power, but they often start as one and the same.

In Cowichan, we are proving what can be achieved for all when reconciliation is the guiding goal in tackling challenges facing our community. Ten years ago under the leadership of then Chief of Cowichan Tribes Lydia Hwitsum and CVRD board chair Gerry Giles, with Rodger Hunter hired as a coordinator, the Cowichan Watershed Board was created.

The Cowichan Watershed Board describes itself as:

"...a local governance entity created...to promote water and watershed sustainability in the Cowichan and Koksilah watersheds, ancestral home of the Quw'utsun' First Nation. Co-chaired by Cowichan Tribes and the Cowichan Valley Regional District, the board represents a unique partnership between First Nations and local government. Through this model, Cowichan Tribes and the regional district work together to advance...watershed health, demonstrating a commitment to moving down the path of reconciliation. The board has a strong track record of planning and implementing technical work, creating a culture of water conservation, promoting science-based advocacy and implementing respectful community-based solutions."

I am blessed and humbled to know Lydia, Gerry and Rodger, and I am so grateful for their incredible foresight and wisdom.

Today Chief Seymour and the chair of the regional district, Aaron Stone, are the co-chairs of the Cowichan Watershed Board. Along with the 11 board members, the technical advisory committee, five working groups and staff members Tom Rutherford and Jill Thompson, they carry on the work that Lydia, Gerry and Rodger began. Also, they continue to nurture the collaborative and respectful spirit that was woven into the fabric of the watershed board from its very beginning.

This is what reconciliation looks like, and the Cowichan Watershed Board shows us again and again that being at the table together and listening to all points of view and working to build consensus and community while striving towards a common goal — the health of
our watersheds — is an example of what is possible in communities all across B.C.

Now, ten years later, the watershed board has had some of its own watershed moments. Last year funding for a long overdue engineering study for a new weir at Cowichan Lake through the B.C. salmon restoration and innovation fund was announced, and the work is getting underway. The campaign to raise awareness and support for the new weir reminds us, with a play on the words “Weir ready” — indeed.

Just last week in Cowichan Tribes council chambers, Chief Seymour and Minister Donaldson signed an interim agreement for a new government-to-government partnership between Cowichan Tribes and the province that is intended to ensure long-term water sustainability in the Koksilah watershed. This is another remarkable step towards watershed protection, and it begins the process of creating a water, or as was said at the signing, a watershed sustainability plan for the Koksilah watershed.

It’s hard to put into words how valuable and important I believe the work of the Cowichan Watershed Board is and how connected reconciliation is to seeing outcomes that are good for everyone in our communities. This is what I think is sometimes forgotten or overlooked or misunderstood. Reconciliation is in part about healing the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. We all have to be part of the work of it, and ultimately, we all benefit from the effort we put into it.

It’s not something that we’re ever going to be finished. We work to heal the relationship. We work to nurture the relationship. We work to remain committed to the relationship, and we always work to do better.

Every day in my constituency I’m reminded of an issue that needs healing through reconciliation. We must do better for families in this province and especially for Indigenous families.

It is telling to me that two vital areas of protection in our province received passing, if any, reference in the government’s Speech from the Throne: children and the environment. There was a brief glance at the child welfare system — a pat on the back for lowering the number of kids in government care. But that, by no means, matches the gravity of the humanitarian crisis we face in this ministry. This government continues to give vast amounts of funding to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, with a direct relation to increased vetting and disciplinary proceedings. In my community, we see the effects of this every day — families who are not held to account for unethical practices.

Families in my constituency continue to be traumatized after being separated from their children at an unacceptable rate. Early on in this term, we had news that a newborn baby would be separated from its mother at birth at the Cowichan District Hospital, and it moved our community to act. What followed were several months and many meetings with a group of local service providers and other community members who expressed deep concern about a system that does not serve those who are most vulnerable.

We heard about systemic racism, bullying, harassment of parents, unsupported families and a lack of dignity and respect for diversity when working through systemic processes. We heard creative solutions for how to better support parents to mitigate children being removed, how social workers are overwhelmed with cases and cannot provide the compassionate service they were trained to provide, how the system does not make social workers accountable in their practice and how the community is ready to participate in any solution that reduces the number of children who are separated from their parents.

We called the group the Cowichan Community of Caring. We learned a great deal about each other and about our community, and we celebrated our diversity.

The result of this work was the Q’ushin’tul project, a four-month research project led by two Cowichan Tribes women. Together with a team of researchers, they gathered input from over 300 elders, youth, recipients of service, community stakeholders, partners and professionals who are directly and indirectly connected with child welfare. Their final report includes their findings and recommendations to enhance child welfare programs, services, practice and delivery. The Q’ushin’tul project came about because a diverse group of local community members engaged in finding a better way forward for Cowichan families. We need more of this kind of work.

In the entirety of the government’s Speech from the Throne, there was not one mention of salmon, wildlife, biodiversity, nature or the ecosystems that we depend on. Even the word “environment” was not used once. Last year the UN Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services stated in stark terms that we are in the midst of an extinction crisis with one million species likely disappearing within decades, the consequences of which will be devastating for ecosystem stability and food production.

Yesterday news broke internationally that a new study from the University of Ottawa indicates that a massive decline of bumblebees, the world’s most important pollinators, is now underway due to climate chaos and other human impacts on the world. They state that bumblebees...
are currently disappearing at rates consistent with a mass extinction and are on course to be wiped out in just a few decades. “We have now entered the world’s sixth mass extinction event, the biggest and most rapid global biodiversity crisis since a meteor ended the age of the dinosaurs,” first author Peter Soroye said.

These are glaring omissions from the throne speech, indicative of the government’s priorities, the neglect of which will reverberate through our province. In the face of this, we have to keep working to do better.

Forestry, for example, is another area that could benefit from community-level governance. Small communities across B.C. have been hurting as our forestry industry continues to experience challenges. Many factors have gotten us to the place we’re in today; but one threat is consistent: policies that have failed to recognize that our forests are a public resource and must be managed for the benefit of the people of B.C. today and into the future.

In revitalizing the forestry industry and supporting small communities in this challenging time, we must be wary of band-aid solutions that don’t move us ahead but actually double down on the model that got us into this situation in the first place. We need to truly put communities at the centre of how we manage our forests and manage for economic, social and environmental values.

We could be leading an innovative, sustainable forestry that adds value and jobs in local communities and leaves us less vulnerable to boom-and-bust cycles. There are exciting examples of this kind of innovation, like Kalesnikoff Lumber’s investment in a mass timber facility in the Kootenays. The government needs to use the tools at its disposal to enable this kind of innovation to grow across B.C., and we need to plan for the future, including the transitions that will be required as climate change takes hold.

Local communities are telling us they want more of a say in how their forests are managed. They no longer want to see logs rolling out of their communities and the jobs going with them. They no longer want to have to fight companies to try to protect critical resources like their drinking watersheds. We should heed their call and provide for far greater regional and local management of this resource.

Community forests are one way to do this. They show us what is possible when we do things differently. They create more local jobs and are better able to effectively manage for multiple values. We can build a prosperous and sustainable future in our forestry industry, but we need some government leadership to make this happen.

The B.C. Green caucus is proud to advance world-leading climate economic policies for our province. We’re proud to have worked with this government to increase accessibility to child care options, to develop a comprehensive housing program, to bring in much-needed reforms to professional reliance, to be the first jurisdiction in North America to enact the declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

We know these policies would not be as strong, not be as effective and not as evidence-based or may not have happened at all if it were not for the B.C. Green presence here in the Legislature. Each one includes hard-fought negotiations that made them better and long hours from our small and very determined team. We have much to be proud of, though many days, setbacks steal that light.

Working within a minority government is a constant evaluation and re-evaluation of our work against the government’s larger agenda. Our work in this chamber doesn’t have an end, because our allegiance is not to this government but to the issues as articulated in CASA. We will not give up. We will keep working to do better.

Ensuring that every British Columbian has the conditions to live a healthy, fulfilling life in a flourishing, supportive environment should be the government’s most important responsibilities. Instead, the state of governance in the fossil fuel era has become a political economy intertwined with industry. The rules have evolved to favour those who stand to gain the most. It is the politics of accommodation. It pivots on threats of competitiveness, bends to meet the demands of fossil fuel interests and is willing to sacrifice for profit.

The arguments supporting “business as usual” exist to justify the short-term concentration of benefits among the few, even as it comes at the cost of the many and leads us towards an increasingly catastrophic outcome. The elected members in this chamber can and must change that.

If there’s any doubt after the countless court challenges, including the constitutional challenge launched yesterday by two Wet’suwet’en Nation Hereditary Chiefs, in an effort to have the federal government commit to climate targets by modifying or cancelling energy projects such as the Coastal GasLink pipeline….

If there was any doubt after decades of warning from scientists and ministries within this very government, from financial institutions or from the floods and fires consuming communities, let the blockades and protests erupting across Canada be the final emphasis. The future of our province is not in fossil fuel megaprojects. It’s not.

When it comes to fossil fuel extraction for combustion, we need to start stopping now. We need to redirect these resources into funding the future we want, because it is clear the story that has guided us for the last hundred years in this province is now failing us. The story that insists that we ship our resources off our coast as quickly as possible and allow communities to be subject to relentless boom-and-bust cycles, rather than create the conditions for sustainable use of our trees, our water, our minerals and sustainable local economies that keep communities healthy and thriving generation after generation.

The story that demands continued consumption and economic growth and ignores the fact that infinite growth
is not possible on a finite planet. The story that makes you believe that we are all separate, separate from each other, separate from nature, that more for you is less for me. To paraphrase the writer Charles Eisenstein, we need a new story that recognizes interdependence, a belief that my well-being is directly related to your well-being, to the well-being of the river, the forest, to the well-being of your children; an understanding and acceptance that what we do to the world, we do to ourselves.

Transitional to a carbon-neutral world doesn't mean going back to the dark ages. In fact, if we went all in right now, we could stand a decent chance of transforming society without huge disruption. It's exciting to think about what a carbon-neutral society would look like day to day as we went about our busy lives. To start, it would be quiet and clean. Cities would be designed for walking, cycling, electric public transit and electric cars. There would be less traffic and no smog. Our homes would be more comfortable: bright, warm and dry in the winter, cool in the summer.

We'd have less plastic and garbage, and our communities would no longer be strewn with litter. With more trees planted and natural spaces conserved to absorb carbon and filter water, we'd have fresh air and more birdsong on our way to work. The salmon would come back, and the bees, too. Sustainable agriculture would provide local, healthy food grown on farms that sequester carbon in the soil and use less pesticides. Sure, we'd eat less meat, but by trading factory-farmed beef for cattle and using slower, sustainable practices, it would taste better. It wouldn't be loaded with antibiotics.

We have so much to gain. It's not just possible that the transition to a clean economy could create jobs. It is inevitable — jobs that are inspired, important and valuable. The shift can be the vehicle to deliver a more just, equitable and healthy society.

I will continue to work in my community, in this Legislature and in this chamber to champion policies based on the best evidence to take us forward to that future that I know we all want to be a part of creating.

**B. D'Eth:** I'm very pleased to rise today in support of the throne speech. But before I talk about the throne speech, I did want to say a few things about my constituency. One of them, of course, is my constituency assistants.

I recently had both of my constituency assistants leave. Sophia Kreuzkamp, who was my campaign manager, has moved to Prince Edward Island, where she's very happy with her partner. I was very sad to lose her, but it's great to know that she's got a new life in Prince Edward Island.

Alison Copeland, who is my CA, recently became the Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture's EA, which is great for Alison and tough for me, because then I lost both of my CAs. But the silver lining is that I have two new wonderful CAs, Simon Child and Alysa Huppler-Poliak, who both hit the ground running in Maple Ridge-Mission. I'm really happy to have them both there.

I'd also like to thank Tamara Connor, who is my RCO. She's been with me for quite a while. She's been through a lot with me, and I really appreciate all the work that she's done. She's actually going to be going to work for the city of North Vancouver. It'll be a shame that she's leaving here, but our loss is North Vancouver's gain.

Of course, if I'm talking about everybody, I really should also talk about Gurbrinder Kang, who is my legislative assistant. She has been with me right from the beginning, and it's been wonderful having someone with so much experience in the Legislature. As a new MLA, she was able to take me through a lot of issues that made it a lot easier for me. So thanks to Gurbrinder.

Of course, like everybody here, we have families and we have people. When we're away, we're away quite a bit. I haven't really had too much of an opportunity to thank my wife, Kim, and my five wonderful children. My eldest just turned 24, Sheldon. Then there's Braden and Cameron and Amy and Aryn. I'm very proud of them. They're all doing very different things, but they're working very hard. We've had a wonderful life in Maple Ridge and Mission. They've grown up there their whole lives and made friends, and we just love being there.

Of course, I love being able to represent Maple Ridge and Mission. It's an incredible area that's growing rapidly. In fact, I just had meetings today with the mayor of Mission, Pamela Alexis. She's saying, and the council is saying, that, in fact, Mission will double in size from 40,000 to over 80,000 over the next 20 years. The Fraser Valley is growing.

Of course, Maple Ridge has seen incredible growth as well. It's over 90,000 people now, so it has really become a big city. We're really proud of the growth. But, of course, with that come challenges in terms of infrastructure, in terms of schools, in terms of many other things.

That's actually why I'm so proud to talk to this throne speech, in support of this throne speech, because it actually did two things for me. It outlined many of the things that we've been working on over the last 2½ years and many of the things that we plan to do over the next coming years. It was very aspirational in that regard, and I'm very happy to speak to that.

Really, it outlines our core goals, which are affordability and providing services for people and, of course, having an economy that works for everyone, not just the top 1 percent of the population, as the previous government — the previous government's focus. So really focusing on services, strong services, a sustainable economy and affordability has been core to what the government has been doing. That was outlined in the throne speech.

A few examples. It's interesting. I heard some of the members in the opposition talk about taxation, but the reality is that low- and middle-income people have seen
a reduction of taxes under our government — things like the elimination of MSP, a regressive tax. It will save, actually, families up to $1,800 a year. Now people are not getting MSP premium bills, and people are really starting to notice that. Now they’re starting to notice the difference in their pocketbook.

In my area, getting rid of the tolls on the Golden Ears Bridge was huge, absolutely transformative for people and businesses. It has changed the whole flow of traffic. Before I became the MLA, we used to joke that it was like a parking lot, and you could play hockey there, and yell “car” every once in a while. There’d be a car every ten minutes or so.

Now it’s well used. It’s part of our growing and dynamic infrastructure. And that’s the point. We built this beautiful bridge between Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows and Langley and Surrey, and people just weren’t using it. Now they’re using it, and it’s great. Not only that; people and businesses are saving an enormous amount of money. I have one business that I know that works in Maple Ridge doing servicing for forklifts.

Most of their business, actually, is over in Langley and Surrey, over the bridge. They were going back and forth over the Golden Ears Bridge every day, multiple times a day. The amount of money that was spent on those tolls ended up, when it was gone, being the amount of money that it was to hire someone new. So it actually wasn’t just saving money for people. It was actually creating jobs in my community. So I’m very, very excited about that elimination.

Last week the government announced new measures to make ICBC insurance less expensive and bring more fairness to drivers by creating a system that will actually reduce the fees and increase benefits. Part of that is getting people out of the courts and getting them the benefits that they need and deserve to move forward with their lives. I think it’s a big move. It’s something that people were very excited to see. Because people in my riding, door-knocking…. No question about it, ICBC is one of the top affordability issues with young drivers and with many different drivers. It’s a big issue to them. The steps that the Attorney General and the government have made are going to have a huge impact on people’s lives in the future.

In fact, there have already been a lot of benefits from the steps that the Attorney General has made in this regard. This year, the rates will be frozen, so people can at least take a breath and say, “Okay, my rates aren’t going to go up again,” with the basic rates. That’s really important. So a lot of the steps have been taken.

In order to really get it under control, the government has to take bold steps. This is a really great way of making sure that we get back to what ICBC was always about. ICBC was always about reasonable insurance and great benefits. When it was at its height of success, that’s exactly what it achieved, until the previous government started taking money out of it and using it to balance their budgets. That’s not what ICBC’s for. It’s not for balancing budgets. It’s for giving reasonable rates to people and providing benefits. So I’m very, very proud and excited about these changes. We’ll see that coming.

Another big area, of course, is the housing crisis. We all saw that. My eldest son tried to go out and rent in Vancouver when he was at VCC, and he ended up having to come back home. It was really frustrating for him. He simply couldn’t afford to live in Vancouver near VCC, which meant he had to commute. So many other people in my community have to commute to work and to school. That’s something that housing affordability will really help, because the best-case scenario is if people can live near where they work and work near where they live so that they don’t have to be having these large commutes. Tackling the housing crisis is a huge part of what is happening. That 30-point plan is starting to really show some action and show some results.

Another way that we’re saving people money and affordability is child care. Moving toward universal child care is transformational. I can’t tell you how many people have come to my office, or when I’m out talking to parents, about these changes. We’ll see that coming.

Another thing that’s happened on child care and with tolls coming off bridges. It’s transformative, it’s transformational. Another way that that’s happened, too, is raising the minimum wage. This has been done in a very responsible way, in terms of…. A number of people who wanted the minimum wage wanted it at $15 right away. It’s been phased in slowly so businesses can adjust. Right now, the minimum wage is at $14.60, and by 2021, it’ll be $15.20 an hour.

This has been a slow, regular increase in rates to lift people out of poverty. The number of people who’ve been living in poverty is dramatic. This will help pull people out of poverty but still allow businesses time to adjust. This is about finding that balance.

We’re starting to see these results. We’re starting to see results in people’s pockets with MSP premiums, with child care and with tolls coming off bridges. It’s transformative, and we’re just getting started. I’m very excited about that.

As far as housing, I look at Maple Ridge and Mission, and there’s been a lot of work done. As I mentioned earlier, I just had a meeting with the mayor of Mission, Pam Alex- is. She is looking at the doubling of the size of Mission, as I mentioned. But there’s been a lot of progress over the last little while in terms of our government’s commitment to housing.
In fact, she was saying that Mission had one of the lowest rental availability rates in the entire country. They just didn't have access to rentals. Since we've got in, there's been a housing hub project that was recently opened, run by Lookout. We're in the middle of building seniors housing there. There's supportive housing that's going to be going up soon.

Basically, she said to me that just before 2017, there were about 600 units that were in progress. Now there are 1,862 units. That's a dramatic increase in the number of affordable rental spaces in Mission.

As far as on the Maple Ridge side, I was so excited when we were able to break ground on a project with community services where there's going to be 36 studios between $375 and $850, 40 one-bedrooms at $375 to $1,050, 13 two-bedrooms at $1,200 to $1,400, and five three-bedrooms at $1,400 to $1,600 — reasonable rates for lower- and middle-income people. Really exciting work.

We've also built over 100 supportive housing units, getting people off the street, which is really important because we were able to close Anita tent city and bring the temperature down in my community. That work was so important, to get people into safe housing with 24-7 supports so that they could get the help that they need.

We're seeing positive movement in my community around people getting off the streets. When I started, we had over 200 homeless people in Maple Ridge. Now we still have homeless, but it's more around 75, and the Salvation Army and other services are able to deal with that and manage that in a manageable way. We're working closely with the city, and hopefully we'll have some other solutions in the works in regards to more housing solutions for Maple Ridge.

Of course, we're committed to seniors housing and other low-income housing for Maple Ridge. I'm very excited about the possibilities there. That's a part of this housing strategy. We're seeing it on the ground in my community, which is really, really exciting.

As far as child care, it's difficult to get the exact numbers, but we're looking at over $20 million in my area going to parents and operators in terms of child care. In particular, there's one child care place, Heritage Park Childcare. It's a prototype site. I talk to parents there, and they actually.... It's very emotional for a lot of parents. When they're paying no more than $200 a month per child, that is changing their lives. That means that child can get into sports, or that child can take music lessons, or they can save for their children's future.

Those are the types of transformative changes that are happening right now in my riding, and it's so exciting to see that.

It's interesting with Heritage Park. Of course, if Simon Gibson was here, he would say: “Well, it's actually in my riding.” Fair enough, it's in Simon's physical riding.

**Deputy Speaker:** No names, Member.

**B. D'Eith:** Oh, my apologies. The hon. member for Abbotsford-Mission. My apologies. And now he's a Deputy Speaker, so I really must be careful what I say, hon. Speaker. Thank you.

At any rate, the member would say that it's in his riding, but I'm proud of everything that's being done in Mission. Like I said, it is transformative, and I'm seeing it on the ground in my riding. It's very, very exciting.

Before I ran, one of the reasons I ran originally was because I had five children in the education system in Maple Ridge. At our elementary school, every year they kept building another portable. Finally what was sort of the straw that broke the camel's back for me was when they put a portable over the track so that the kids couldn't have any sports day or any track and field.

I don't blame the school or the school board. The school didn't have the capacity. The Albion area was exploding in population, absolutely exploding. We knew that this was happening ten years before, and we were calling and calling for a new elementary school. Of course, the announcement for that elementary school came hours before the writ was dropped. Yes, casqanelo has been built. It's a beautiful school. At the same time, when we opened that school in Albion, the minister was able to announce that there was actually some foresight into purchasing a new site for an elementary school in the Albion area. That's really exciting.

Another thing that's happened, another reason I ran originally was just the number of schools that were getting closed. There were over 200 schools closed under the previous government.

One of the things. Stave Falls is a little rural school there that was closed down. I was so excited — it's very rare — that this school recently reopened this last year. It was so exciting, for the small community there, to see. Reopening this school — all of the things that happened around that, all of the benefits around having a rural school in that area — was very, very exciting. We were very, very pleased to see that this is one of the more than 80 school capital projects that have been funded. We're really very excited about that.

As far as other services, there's just been incredible work by the Minister of Health in health care throughout the entire province and hospitals being built. One of the key changes or key progress that's being made is in team-based care. Recently an urgent primary care centre was opened in Maple Ridge. We have about 18,000 people in Maple Ridge who don't have access to a GP. This is a way of connecting people to a GP, to a nurse practitioner, to the primary care that they need.

In the future, there's also a primary care network. I've had the pleasure of meeting with this network, this group of practitioners from so many different fields who are so excited about being able to build, for example, protocols
for chronic pain or for mental health and to be able to put them all under one roof so that when people come in, they can be triaged and they can be given the service they need right away.

This type of model is very exciting. I’m so pleased that we were able to open this urgent primary care in Maple Ridge. This is part of the commitment the government has made in the throne speech to hospitals, to these kinds of care centres, to hip-and-knee clinics and to all these other services around the province. This is really, really important work.

Another very important part in my life is treatment of mental health. I have one brother who’s suffered with mental health for over 30 years. He’s getting the help he needs, with constant advocacy from the family. It never stops. He’s getting the help he needs. There are a lot of people who don’t have those parents or family members advocating, and what happens with them? We really need to have those robust mental health facilities and those mental health programs.

One of the keys is early intervention. Now, I think it’s so important to recognize when something happens early. That’s why the Foundry centres are so important. They’re so valuable. In Maple Ridge, there was the Youth Wellness Centre, which was a very similar model to the Foundry model. Then recently, just within the last few weeks, it has reopened as a Foundry, in a new location. We’re just so excited to have this. Especially with youth, if they can get in, be seen quickly and get the help they need, they can actually mitigate a lot of the damages that can happen to mental health.

What can happen is that if mental health conditions are not dealt with, then they can compound. Things like, for example, use of drugs, self-medication or other types of mental health can expand from that. Then it’s much, much harder to help the person suffering from mental illness.

I’m so excited about that, that the Foundry has opened in Maple Ridge. There are a number of others that are opening as well around the province. I’ve managed to visit the Foundry that’s been operating in Abbotsford for a number of years. It’s an amazing facility. You go in there, and the staff are so enthusiastic about what they’re doing and what they’re being able to provide to youth and to families. It’s amazing, and it’s part of the work that’s being done by this government. I’m very, very proud of that.

Another thing that’s happened, too, is an investment in getting mental health supports right into our schools. Again, the district of Maple Ridge is one of the first districts to actually get some funding to embed mental health support into schools so that any type of mental health crisis or condition can be dealt with early on.

If we can do that, we can help head off real problems in the future for people who are suffering from mental health issues. That is very, very important to me, to my community and to the youth in our community.

As far as the economy, I’m really pleased that we have one of the strongest economies in the province. We have the lowest unemployment rate. We have maintained our triple-A credit rating, which allows us to invest in more capital projects under the stewardship of the Minister of Finance, who is doing an amazing job at balancing the budgets but also providing the services that we need.

At the end of the day, it’s about choice. It’s about choosing the things that are most important to people. I know that’s said a lot, but I see that every day in our caucus. Every single day, when we’re sitting in our caucus meetings, the first thing that comes up if we’re making a decision is: what is best for the people of British Columbia? We do that with everything we do.

If you do that, you start making the right decisions. You start getting rid of MSP premiums. You start investing in child care. You start trying to deal with the housing crisis. You deal with things like the corruption that’s happening in casinos and money laundering, because it’s important to people that we don’t have an out-of-control housing market in our province. That’s really important.

It’s an economy that works for people. That’s the most important thing. You can have growth in an economy where the only people that benefit are a few people at the top. Often governments tout these growth economies, but when they actually look at the income gap, it’s growing wider and wider because in fact the benefit of that growth is going to fewer and fewer people in our economy. That’s why it’s so important to make sure that our economy works for everyone.

That means not promoting part-time, tenuous jobs but making sure that we get well-paid jobs that are sustainable over a longer period of time. That’s why things like the community benefits agreement are so important.

One of the things the past government did is that they didn’t train people for the future. Now we are stuck in a situation where everywhere I went as the Chair of the Finance Committee — everywhere I went — where you talk to businesses, you talk to industry, one of the number one things they talk about is the lack of access to skilled labour.

Well, one of the things that we need to do as government — and certainly the minister of post-secondary education has done that — in terms of the industry and supporting industry, is getting people trained and making sure that we look at women in trades, we look at First Nations and Indigenous people in trades, that we encourage people to get their ticket so that they can have a career in the trades and really be part of this amazing economy that we have. That’s why the community benefits agreements are so important, moving forward.

In terms of the economy and infrastructure and building, we’re having record investments in infrastructure and development, which is really critical. I know I can see it
every day in my riding. Right now, we're in the middle of…. The Haney Bypass is being completely changed.

There is four-laning in Mission of Highway 7, and recently we just announced, with the federal government, the final four-laning of Highway 7, which the people of Whonnock had been calling for, for decades, because there are so many accidents. It's a huge safety issue where people are coming from a four-lane to a two-lane highway, and the head-on collisions there have been horrific over the period of time.

This type of work — where we can not only improve the congestion but also the safety of the region — is so vitally important. That's another thing that I'm really proud of in my riding and part of what the throne speech illustrated.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Another thing that was important was putting lights between 228 and Laity, because people were getting killed on Highway 7. It's a busy highway, and this government responded to that.

I didn't have a chance…. I see that we're coming to the end of my time, and I really did want to say, too, what I'm so proud of. The Green Party who've left after their speech…. I did want to mention that our work in CleanBC is really important. The great thing about CleanBC is that whenever I'm talking to the cities or to the municipal governments, they're excited about being able to move forward. When you talk to developers, they're often excited about what we can do to build green.

So this type of leadership, in terms of trying to change our economy so that we're getting more clean by giving incentives, for example, for electric vehicles, those types of things, or investing in other infrastructure to make sure that our air and land and water are clean for our kids going into the future is so important. I would be remiss if I didn't emphasize how important that is.

In closing, I just want to say that with this throne speech, it's been very, very clear to me that so much has been done over the last 2½ years to make life more affordable for people, investing in services. There is so much more work to do. And at the same time, we've been able to balance our budgets. We've been able to show that you can make choices for the people of this province and still have a strong balanced budget and a strong economy.

With that, I would like to take my seat and just say that I'm very supportive of the throne speech and look forward to the other comments.

J. Yap: It's my honour and privilege to join in this debate on this, the opening of the fifth session of the 41st parliament of our Legislative Assembly, as the MLA for Richmond-Steveston on behalf of my constituents. I want to, as all colleagues do, start out by expressing some thanks. I'll spend a little bit of time on this.

First and foremost, I want to thank my family, who give me permission to be away from home to be here, and with a bit of inspiration from the member for Vancouver-West End, extend my love to my wife Suzanne and my two children, who I love a lot, my daughter Lisa and her husband SJ, as well as my son Michael. I know all of us appreciate the support of our families in the work that we do, which keeps us often away from home and from family.

I also want to say a big thank-you to the people that provide the support to me and make it possible for me to be the MLA, first and foremost, in the constituency: my constituency assistants, PoWah Ng and Trevor Merrell and Angell Yao; and also here in Victoria, my support staff, my legislative assistant, Randy Roy, as well as the support communications officer, Stu Bertrand, and my research officer, John Hennenfent — people who work tirelessly to support MLAs, including myself.

I do want to extend thanks as well to all of the staff here at the Legislative Assembly who toil quietly behind the scenes. They work hard. I find that I don't say thank you often enough, and I want to specifically address that, as some of the members have in their remarks in response to the throne speech.

These past few days have been remarkable in the history of our province, as we've seen these demonstrations continue. In fact, right now as I speak, they continue elsewhere, having started around the province in the north, in other parts of Canada and, when we arrived on Tuesday, here at the Legislative Assembly. I want to say a thank-you to the Protective Services staff of the Legislative Assembly who did yeoman's work — very difficult circumstances — as they tried to deal with demonstrators who were very passionate. Many were very angry, and maybe that anger led them to behave in ways that all of us would say are regrettable. That affected all members here and staff. So I want to thank the Protective Services. I want to thank the Sergeant-at-Arms staff, the sessional staff, the Clerk's office for their great work. I know all members feel that gratitude during these interesting and difficult times.

The throne speech is a time when the government of the day will lay out a blueprint of its vision for what its priorities are, and it acts as a guide for what we can expect in the coming session. This throne speech is supposed to be a vision statement, an outline of priorities for the government. This one, of course, is the very first of this new session, this new decade, this new year. From my point of view, it was, frankly, disappointing. Of course, it had a lot of self-congratulatory parts to it, but it was, frankly, lacking in any sense of vision or any major, bold initiatives. It sure sounded like the same speech from last year and without some forward-looking visions that I would like to have seen.

I didn't see any bold ideas. It almost seems like the government had used up their ideas in the last 2½ years, and this throne speech, from my point of view, from my point of view, had very slim pickings in terms of new initiatives. We will see the budget next week. It may explain why this
throne speech was bereft of anything new or bold, because from everything we’ve heard, the signs are there — the economy is slowing down and revenues to the province are starting to decline, are declining. We will see next week what the budget brings.

Instead, the throne speech did talk about a number of things which are, frankly, not top of mind for most British Columbians. It talked about cell phone rates. Of course, everyone who has a cell phone is interested, but it’s a federal issue, as you know, Mr. Speaker. It talks about concert and entertainment tickets. Yes, that’s an important issue, but not top of mind for most British Columbians. Again, these were highlighted in last year’s speech, and apparently there has been a lack of progress on those two issues.

Now, I’m not up to speed on the issue of guns in hospitals and schools, but it does seem a bit out of place for a throne speech in the province of British Columbia, where we would hope and we would expect that a throne speech would be focused on the kinds of things that would help our economy, attract investment, create jobs and get people ahead.

I’d like to talk a little bit about what almost every member has talked about. That is the idea of making life more affordable, which we know was a centrepiece of the government’s mandate from July of 2017, when they started in government. This throne speech shows that the NDP have no idea of how to make life more affordable and in fact, as I will lay out, are engaging in policies that are making life more expensive for many British Columbians.

“What?” you may ask. Well, there are the 19 new and increased taxes that have been implemented over the last 2½ years, which have made it more challenging, financially, for many British Columbians. The trickle-down effect of these increased taxes, across the board, is that many of these are passed on to consumers, who are already being taxed at a higher rate than three years ago. This is not sustainable.

A case in point is what is top of mind for many British Columbians, and that is insurance premiums on their cars and their automobiles. The rate of premium increases has made them unaffordable for so many British Columbians. Yes, the government has announced some changes that would be coming in, some major changes to ICBC. Yes, the rates went up, but — surprise, surprise — there will be a rebate in 2021, which happens to be the election year. So just before the vote, there’ll be a cheque in the mail for British Columbians for their ICBC premiums.

Just a word of reminder to our friends across the way: this same tactic was tried the last time that they were in government, and they should remember how that worked out for them when the cheque was sent in the mail. I remember — as I’m sure that others who are old enough will remember — receiving that cheque in the mail from ICBC just before the election.

ICBC premiums have continued to skyrocket out of control, and the NDP have decided that they’re going to stick with a 46-year-old state-run monopoly that just does not work anymore in the modern world, in the world we live in. Instead of introducing some competition to the industry, of giving B.C. drivers the possibility of choice in their auto insurance, the NDP are growing the ICBC bureaucracy. We’re hearing that the size of the bureaucracy at ICBC has been growing by leaps and bounds in the last couple of years.

Also, the government has announced that they’re going to take away accident victims’ rights — breaking, I should add, election promises along the way — as we’ve seen in recent media reports. This is a trend that sees no sign of slowing down — this commitment to this outdated model.

Now, the government is quick to scoff at objections and critiques, and they fail to understand why British Columbians will be worse off. Every day, I — as, I’m sure, with every MLA — receive email after email from folks who are frustrated at the rising cost of insurance premiums. That’s not sustainable.

Now, as I mentioned, the government has announced that they’re going to a no-fault system. But what is being proposed, and we will see the details when the legislation is introduced…. Their no-fault system appears not to have the checks and balances that other jurisdictions like Quebec and Saskatchewan have. They give people the right to opt out of the no-fault system, so where is the fairness in that?

In the area of taxes, as I mentioned, 19 new and increased taxes have been introduced in the last two-and-a-half years. That has not made life more affordable. Even something that should have been seen as a win…. I know that the government communications department likes to advertise the fact that the MSP has been eliminated. The reality is that it was just replaced, as we’ve heard from my other colleagues in the opposition caucus, with the employer health tax.

We have heard — all of us have heard; I’m sure government members have heard — from people in business, from entrepreneurs, from people working for non-profit organizations that the employer health tax is just crushing them, crushing small business on what was supposed to be a win with the elimination of MSP.

This is affecting not just the large corporations, the large organizations, but throughout society. Even municipal police forces are grappling with the cost of the employer health tax, wrestling with this, actually having to make a choice between curtailing service, laying off staff to deal with it, or having to pass this cost on to consumers.

Another area that is really affecting a lot of people in greater Vancouver is the split zoning air tax that is forcing businesses to close their doors because property taxes are simply unaffordable. Small businesses are being affected in a very tangible, very real way by this unsustainable increase in property taxes.
Then there is the speculation tax, another example of taxation that is costing British Columbians more, costing them in terms of their equity and their retirement plan as their homes are hit by this tax.

Another topic that is important to British Columbians, and all members have addressed this, is housing. I will take the opportunity to address the issue of housing and other topics relating to the throne speech when we return.

At this time, I reserve my right to continue speaking and move that we adjourn debate.

J. Yap moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. D. Eby: I move that when the House next adjourns after the adoption of this motion, it do stand adjourned until 10 a.m. on Tuesday, February 18, 2020.

Motion approved.

Hon. D. Eby moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until Tuesday, February 18 at 10 a.m.

The House adjourned at 5:50 p.m.
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