



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

Fifth Session, 41st Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT
OF DEBATES
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 18, 2020
Morning Sitting
Issue No. 307

THE HONOURABLE DARRYL PLECAS, SPEAKER

ISSN 1499-2175

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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Honourable Darryl Plecas

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2020

The House met at 10:06 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Routine Business

Prayers and reflections: J. Thornthwaite.

Introductions by Members

Hon. H. Bains: In the House today, I think one of the very rare moments: my son Kal Bains is up there. He tells me that he watched question period — loves our Premier. He's here today. I think he will enjoy it.

Along with him are my two nephews, Bhup Hothi and Sucha Sekhan — two, I would say, up-and-coming entrepreneurs. They employ, between the two of them, dozens of British Columbians, and their business is thriving. They're compassionate people, and they're key members of my campaign team. I just want to say thank you. I blame them every time I don't like this job, which is very, very few times. So please join with me and give them a very, very warm welcome.

A. Wilkinson: In the annual cycle, today we're pleased to welcome the 2020 interns. It's my pleasure to introduce, from the gallery, Maliki Suppin, Noelle Skillings, Stephen Bagan, Erin Spence and Kathryn Haegedorn. Now, they started, actually, last Tuesday. It may seem like they joined the navy on D-Day, but we can assure them that it's not like this every day, even today. We look forward to a peaceful and productive engagement with our interns. They're smiling in the gallery like everything is just a delight, and we expect to keep it that way. Please welcome the new legislative interns.

J. Yap: We have a delegation visiting from Richmond. With us in the gallery are members of the board of directors and staff of the Richmond Chamber of Commerce, which I'll be speaking a little bit about shortly. With us in the gallery are chair Fan Chun, immediate past chair Barbara Tinson and directors Bernard Loh, Tina Wu, Rachel Li, Chuck Keeling, Robert Boscacci and Natalie Meixner as well as Grant Bryan. We also have staff members Matt Pitcairn, the CEO, as well as Shaena Furlong and Dan Sakaki. Would the House please give them a warm welcome.

B. Stewart: It gives me great pleasure to welcome some constituents of Kelowna West here today. We have with us Elayne and Brian Alexander. Elayne is an avid watcher of QP. That's one of her weekly TV fixes. As they later described it, it can be entertaining and very rewarding.

Brian and she have been big supporters of myself and have a new business in the Westside.

I also have my constituency assistant Cheryl Doll, who is here, with bated breath, to hear more about the budget today and learn more about how some of the things that our constituents are looking for in terms of relief and speculation tax and things like that might be part of today's budget.

Please welcome them.

[10:10 a.m.]

Tributes

RAMAN JHUTI

R. Kahlon: I rise to share some sad news: the tragic passing of a friend of mine, Raman Jhuti. Raman was born on June 19, 1977, and passed away on February 13, 2020. His friends and family are really struggling with this tragic event.

Raman was an amazing guy. He had a super power. His super power was that he could walk into a room and make everybody feel special. It didn't matter if you hadn't seen him in a month, a year or a decade. It felt like.... The moment you saw him, he made it feel like you'd been together every single day for that time.

He leaves behind his loving partner, Leticia; his parents, Sewa and Manjeet; his grandmother Parkash; his loving sisters Sandy and Sunita; nephews Savin and Maya.

Raman's friends and family will gather to celebrate his life on this coming Saturday, February 22, at 11 a.m. at Mellor Hall in Duncan. I hope this House will join me in sending condolences to his family.

Introductions by Members

D. Barnett: Today I have a friend from Williams Lake who is a very busy young man. He was the vice-president of the Williams Lake Stampede. He still participates in the stampede and works tirelessly. He's past president of one of the Rotary clubs in Williams Lake.

He also has an amazing little stand, a hamburger stand that he pulls from venue to venue, and he donates his time and energy into helping some of our volunteer organizations raise some money to do great things in our community. He's also young compared to some of the rest of us here today, so I'd like you experienced politicians to show him how respectful we are of each other. Will all of you please welcome my friend Lorne Doerksen.

A. Olsen: It's my honour to stand today and welcome to the House, for the first time, two exceptional young people who will be working with us as interns in the B.C. Green caucus. Hailey May graduated from University of British Columbia, and Federico Cerani is a graduate of Simon Fraser University.

On behalf of the whole House, welcome. We look forward to working with you over the next few months. Enjoy question period today.

S. Sullivan: I'd like to announce one of our newest citizens in British Columbia. Lynn is a grandmother, and the baby is named Zoe Lynn. I'd like to just announce that.

Hon. J. Horgan: Many of you will know that on February 18, 36 years ago, I managed to convince Ellie Horgan to spend the rest of her life with me. I said to her at that time that it would never be dull. There you go.

Today wasn't the way we had anticipated celebrating our 36th wedding anniversary. But I know that all members of this House, if not for me, will certainly want to, in unison, say: "Way to go, Ellie Horgan. You're a pretty cool person." Please join me in doing that.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

BILL 3 — ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT AMENDMENT ACT, 2020

Hon. G. Heyman presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intitled Environmental Management Amendment Act, 2020.

Hon. G. Heyman: I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

I am pleased to introduce Bill 3, the Environmental Management Amendment Act, 2020. This bill proposes a series of amendments to the Environmental Management Act to enhance the oversight of soil relocation in the province for the better protection of human health and the environment. This bill is the result of ongoing consultation with local governments, Indigenous nations, the federal government and stakeholders, highlighting the need for improvements in the soil relocation process in British Columbia.

[10:15 a.m.]

This bill will strengthen the process in three tangible ways. First, this bill streamlines the process by focusing on soil that exceeds a prescribed volume and originates from certain industrial or commercial sites in B.C. Second, this bill establishes a robust and transparent notification system to track soil movement throughout the province that will better ensure accountability on the part of those moving the soil. Third, this bill specifically responds to the concerns regarding sites receiving high volumes of soil by introducing additional requirements for such sites to prevent contamination of the environment, including groundwater.

Changes to the contaminated sites regulation will be developed to support full implementation of the amendments to the act. This bill responds to British Columbians'

desire for more meaningful monitoring and oversight of contaminated soil movement in our province.

Mr. Speaker: The question is first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Heyman: I move that this bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 3, Environmental Management Amendment Act, 2020, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

FOREST INDUSTRY AND WORKERS

J. Rustad: B.C.'s forest sector workers are proud of what they do. They like to get up in the morning and work a hard but fulfilling day. More than 120,000 men and women across this province depend directly or indirectly on a healthy forest sector. More than 140 communities depend on a vibrant, competitive forest industry. Forestry feeds these families. Forestry is the backbone of these communities and of my riding of Nechako Lakes.

B.C.'s forest sector has driven technological development. It has opened areas for recreation, hunting, exploration and so much more. It supports agriculture and countless small businesses. Forestry is a foundational industry to the economic health of B.C. and to the quality of life we all enjoy.

Today thousands of these hard-working men and women, along with their families, will make their way to Victoria. They're here not to shut down anything, but they're here to raise their voice. These people are simply asking that the land base they work on is there for them and their children.

More than 15 percent of this great province is already protected through parks. Significant protections have been put in place through the Great Bear Rainforest and other initiatives to ensure a balanced environment while supporting a robust forest sector. Is it too great an ask for governments to set aside an area for a working forest?

Forestry is the most renewable industry on the planet. It gives us carbon-friendly building material. It provides us with a wide range of recyclable products. Most importantly, it establishes new trees that are the key to sequestering carbon and supporting our future.

B.C.'s forest industry is struggling. It needs our support and people to understand its important role in our society. It needs to be competitive, it needs markets, and it needs to receive the recognition it deserves.

The people we will see today are raising their voices. It is not a complex ask. It is not a political ask. But it is an ask in desperation, as people are afraid for their future. Who will be listening to them? Will there be action?

HOME OF CANADIAN TRADITIONAL CHINESE MEDICINE SOCIETY

M. Elmore: Dedication, accountability and giving are the fundamental principles of the Home of Canadian Traditional Chinese Medicine Society, HCTCMS, a non-profit organization established by a group of traditional Chinese medicine doctors and acupuncturists in British Columbia.

Founded by Dr. Ron Gang Lee, the chairperson of the national coalition of TCM of Canada, HCTCMS has grown to an organization of more than 680 members. Led by Dr. Lee, the organization participates in local community events. At the 11th Annual Vancouver Water Splashing Festival and every Annual International Senior Festival, HCTCMS hosts free traditional Chinese medicine clinics to provide top-notch consultations to more than 500 event visitors. To date, thousands of British Columbians have benefited from the organization's volunteer services.

The organization also commits to professional traditional Chinese medicine development and training. Each month HCTCMS hosts free academic lectures and professional skills training for their fellow traditional Chinese medical doctors and acupuncturists.

[10:20 a.m.]

Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners and acupuncturists at the HCTCMS provide more than 100,000 traditional Chinese medical service sessions to British Columbians every year. I ask everyone to join me in recognizing how the Home of Canadian Traditional Chinese Medicine Society makes a difference to improve and promote health and social harmony in British Columbia.

RICHMOND CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

J. Yap: I rise to talk about a great organization that speaks for the entrepreneurs of my community, the Richmond Chamber of Commerce. Founded as the Richmond and Point Grey board of trade in 1910 by a group of local farmers and merchants, it became its own entity in 1925. Today the Richmond Chamber of Commerce has 900 members from a wide variety of sectors, employing many thousands of workers.

Adapting to the ethnic diversity of today's Richmond, the chamber offers services and hosts events in Mandarin, Cantonese and English to better serve the community. The chamber has a long history of acting as an advocate for Richmond businesses, engaging with all levels of government. In fact, today will be the chamber's board of directors fourth annual visit to Victoria on budget day.

Each year the chamber helps over 100 new entrepreneurs in the first steps of starting their businesses, hosts over 50 events each year, ranging from the Business Excellence Awards gala every November to networking events and topical business seminars. For example, on March 11, the chamber's active women's leadership circle, headed by immediate past chair Barbara Tinson, will host a panel and luncheon on the subject of unconscious bias.

In 2019, the chamber modernized its membership model, focusing on finding affordable and flexible ways to help all Richmond businesses connect, grow, influence and lead. As demand for its services has grown, the chamber recently moved to new, larger premises. Richmond chamber actively supports the British Columbia and Canadian chambers of commerce, participating in policy development and sending delegates to the provincial and national chamber events.

The chamber is an important community partner and adds to the quality of life in the city of Richmond. I would like to extend thanks and kudos to board chair Fan Chun, the directors, CEO Matt Pitcairn and the staff for doing a great job making the Richmond Chamber of Commerce the voice for business in our community.

ATHLETES IN MAPLE RIDGE-PITT MEADOWS AREA

B. D'Eith: I rise today to highlight some incredible successes of athletes in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, and also on behalf of the member for Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows.

First we have Monika Eggens. Monika, when she used to be at Pitt Meadows Secondary School, used to look up at the Hometown Heroes banner and be really aspirational towards that. Now her water polo skills are going to take her to her first Olympics, and Monika has recently been named this year's Hometown Hero. We're really proud of her.

Next, Maple Ridge's skating club isometrics juvenile and pre-novice girls both took top spots in their respective divisions at the 2020 Mountain Regionals synchronized skating championships in Red Deer, Alberta, where they competed with over 600 skaters from across western Canada.

Next up we have the Westview Secondary wrestlers. There are ten from Westview Secondary that are going to the provincials. We also have Westview's Cadet Girl's wrestling team. They won gold at the Western Canada Age Class competition this month. The Maple Ridge Secondary Ramblers also had a historic performance at the Fraser Zone championships, and all of the wrestlers are going to the provincials.

To the Ramblers and the Wildcats: thank you for showing us so much dedication to your sport.

I'd also be remiss if I didn't give a shout-out to our very own Karina LeBlanc and Larry Walker. Karina is the

newest member of Canada Soccer Hall of Fame. She's a UNICEF ambassador and an Olympic medallist. She's an inspiration to so many young athletes not only in Maple Ridge but around the province. Larry Walker, of course, the star of the Montreal Expos, St. Louis Cardinals and Colorado Rockies, was just named last month to the MLB hall of fame. So great stars.

Our athletes recognize the supports that came from.... Karina, for example, said: "If it wasn't for Maple Ridge, I would never have kicked a soccer ball."

[10:25 a.m.]

We see the opportunity that these athletes have — from their school competitions and others — to be professional athletes, go to the Olympics and others. To all the hockey players, rugby players, soccer players, skiers, wrestlers and more: keep doing what you're doing. You're making us proud and inspiring a new generation of people to stay active, stay healthy and compete to the best of their abilities.

HIGHWAY SAFETY IN PENTICTON AND PEACHLAND AREA

D. Ashton: If you've ever had the pleasure of travelling to Summerland or Peachland on a beautiful summer day, you would know that that stretch of highway is one of the most beautiful drives in British Columbia. As the highway follows the contours of the mountains and the clay banks, Okanagan Lake shimmers in the sun, and the vineyards and orchards dot the horizon. It is truly a testament to many that the Okanagan splendour is simply unparalleled.

However, this majestic area can have a dark side. During the winter months, as the snow drifts and covers the roads and visibility can drop to zero quite often, the same stretch becomes treacherous and, in some cases, deadly. Again last month somebody lost their life as a car lost control and crossed into an oncoming vehicle — something that now seems to happen way too frequently.

The reality is that people are being injured and lives are being lost on this stretch of highway. Something needs to be done — specifically, installing concrete divider barriers to help protect from the very tragedy, again, that happened in January.

The newer four-lane highway is much safer than the original two-lane roadway, but with changing climatic conditions, higher speeds and, unfortunately, driver neglect and inattentiveness, crossover accidents are occurring way too frequently on the stretch of highway between Penticton and Greata Ranch, just south of Peachland. Opposing-lane division barriers are in place south of West Kelowna and in locations north of Kelowna to Vernon. I hope similar placements of these life-saving barriers can be installed south of Peachland to Penticton.

This morning I will be introducing a strongly supported petition with over 26,600 names on this very issue. I ask: if you have a chance, read some of the comments from friends and families that had loved ones injured and killed

on this stretch of highway. Nothing I can say can portray the anguish and pain that they have experienced, but I can ask on their behalf for immediate consideration by government and the ministry to initiate the placement of concrete barriers, wherever possible, between the opposing lanes on this stretch of highway.

OPTIONS COMMUNITY SERVICES SOCIETY

J. Sims: Diversity, integrity, resourcefulness, collaboration, excellence — these are the values upheld by Options Community Services Society. If you hear the word "options," most people in Surrey, White Rock and Delta know a service they offer and know someone who has benefited from using these services. I know this is a regular resource used in our community, and in our offices, we hear lots of feedback.

Options is a key social service agency that offers a breadth and depth of services. Options employs over 400 people and runs over 80 different programs and projects. Last year they touched the lives of over 100,000 people, in 49 different languages. They have 590 volunteers that contribute over 32,000 hours each year. From needing a place to stay, to looking for employment, community school services, support for substance abuse or offering community inclusion and integration, from suicide prevention to translation services, child care and housing registries, crisis transition housing support and counselling, these are just some of the services they offer.

Under the leadership of the executive director, Christine Mohr, and her deputy directors Ivan, Tammy, Slinder, Khim and Sandra, this diverse organization is united in the purpose of helping people to help themselves and promoting safe, healthy and vibrant communities. They have successfully been doing this for close to 50 years.

They work closely with all levels of government — provincial, municipal and federal — to ensure access to resources and services. They work in centres, in schools, in homes and in the community. They truly are an agency that is there for everyone. Their vision is to inspire hope and belonging to all. I know that MLAs who have worked with Options Community Services Society will agree with me that their vision is 20-20.

Oral Questions

FOREST INDUSTRY AND GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR COMMUNITIES AND WORKERS

M. Stilwell: Today there are hard-working families, forestry families, here en masse at the Legislature. They're not here to stop government from doing its business.

[10:30 a.m.]

What they actually want is for government to do its job and stop sitting on the sidelines as entire communities fall apart. What they want is to hear from this government.

They want to know exactly what the government's plan is so that they can continue to feed their families.

Will the Forests Ministry go out and speak to the forestry workers today?

Hon. D. Donaldson: I want to thank those who have organized the rally today to bring attention to how important forestry is to this province, to the rural communities and, I think unknown to many people, to the urban centres as well. So thank you for organizing that.

Yes, I made a commitment when I was visiting communities in the north Island that when the people came down to visit, I would meet with them. So that's clear. I look forward to doing that, because we need to hear — as I said, I've visited the north Island numerous times — directly from the people.

We're taking action in order to support those communities. The most recent example of that is the great work done by the Minister of Labour to help resolve the labour dispute and put people back to work in forestry on Vancouver Island.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Parksville-Qualicum on a supplemental.

M. Stilwell: Well, it's nice to think that the minister seems to think he's taking action after several months — months and months — of forestry workers out of work, not able to pay their bills, losing their homes and losing their cars. Now he says he's acting.

Exports in the forestry industry declined 20 percent last year. This crisis is not over. Closures are continuing to be announced in 2020. Just on Friday, we heard that Paper Excellence in Crofton announced that it will be curtailing its operations as well, and 450 workers will be impacted in a town of less than 1,500 people.

When will this minister take action? What will he say to those forestry workers today about losing their jobs while he sits and does nothing?

Hon. D. Donaldson: We know the old government saw the loss of 30,000 forestry jobs and the permanent closure of dozens of mills. That's their record. They sat on their hands while communities suffered across the coast, across Vancouver Island and across the north.

Upon becoming government, we immediately enacted and took engagement on the coast forest sector revitalization program. It's meant to drive more fibre to domestic production and bring more fibre out of the forest. That's because everything we're doing is to ensure that the forests surrounding the communities are, first and foremost, to the benefit of workers and those members of the communities.

J. Johal: It seems the Forests Minister's main job is teaching the parliamentary secretary how to ignore the

crisis in the forest industry. Ten thousand jobs have been impacted, and it has happened all across the province. What did the parliamentary secretary have to say? "There are too many mills."

To the minister, is the closure of ten mills enough for this NDP government?

Hon. D. Donaldson: Well, perhaps the member opposite is new here, and perhaps he didn't cover it when he was a former TV broadcaster. But we know from documents created when that side of the Legislature was in government, 2015.... They knew that up to 13 mills could be closed. You know what they did? Nothing. They did nothing about that.

We've taken this on as a government, through the coast forest sector revitalization initiative and through the Interior forest sector initiative, to make sure that we reverse the negative trends that ended up under this previous government and turn them around for the forest workers, for communities and for rural areas in this province.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Richmond-Queensborough on a supplemental.

[10:35 a.m.]

J. Johal: Last month the parliamentary secretary said: "I act like a cabinet minister. I just go and do the work I want to do." It begs the question: what does the Forests Minister do?

What all this means is the NDP is quite content closing mills because no one on that side wants to step up and help these communities and this industry in crisis. They've done nothing for workers at Teal-Jones in Surrey and nothing for Interfor Hammond in Maple Ridge.

Once again, will someone over there — someone — actually do something for this industry?

Hon. D. Donaldson: This is an interesting narrative from the other side. We've had criticisms from some members over there that we're doing too much, too fast. Other members saying: "Get on. Take action." You can't get your stories straight.

We are seeing investment across the province. Investment in a mill in the Kootenays. Investment in pellet plants throughout the Interior. We're doing what we can. We're doing, responsibly, policy work. We're doing it for the workers and for the communities across this province. We know how much they are dependent upon the forest sector, and we're taking action, unlike the previous government.

B.C. HYDRO AGREEMENTS WITH INDEPENDENT POWER PRODUCERS

A. Weaver: Under the NDP government in the 1990s,

B.C. Hydro actively courted small-scale power producers to join their grid. One company, Silversmith hydro, received an offer to provide power to the New Denver area, in exchange for the opportunity to sell electricity to green markets. In formally accepting the offer, Silversmith bore the upfront costs associated with connecting to the B.C. Hydro grid.

Despite Silversmith's sunk costs, B.C. Hydro later backed out of their agreement, compensating Silversmith at junk power rates, which were less than the cost of generation. After Silversmith raised the issue with the B.C. Liberal government, B.C. Hydro offered Silversmith a fair market price for their electricity, but they only purchased a quarter of their capacity. During this same time period, B.C. Hydro continued to enter into opaque contracts with many large IPPs.

The situation with Silversmith is representative of how B.C. Hydro has dealt with numerous other small-scale power producers, even though many of these companies are considered to be the greenest hydro producers in the province.

My question is to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources. When is the government planning to rectify this situation and begin to deal more fairly with small-scale hydro producers in this province?

Hon. B. Ralston: Thanks to the member for the first question I've had in my new role as the Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources.

Let me say that the B.C. Liberals chose to sign a series of sweetheart deals with their friends in the independent power sector, which cost every B.C. Hydro customer an extra \$200 a year. In total, given the length of these contracts, people will pay, in British Columbia, a staggering \$16 billion on unnecessary costs, all because the old government put their friends first.

They made a huge mess at B.C. Hydro and left people to pay for it. Some of the fallout is what is referred to in the member's question. Under their watch, power rates went up by 70 percent. Given the chance, they wouldn't have lowered hydro rates. Their plan would have seen people's rates increase more than twice as much, compared to our approach.

We're focused on cleaning up the mess the old government left at B.C. Hydro and making it work for people. Making life affordable for people is a top priority for us as we work through phase 1 of the B.C. Hydro review. As part of this work, B.C. Hydro is taking a prudent, case-by-case approach to deciding whether to renew expiring energy purchase agreements with independent power producers ensuring that prices are cost-effective for taxpayers.

I'm pleased to say that as a result of this hard work, we'll be able to apply for a rate reduction. This is the first time B.C. Hydro has been able to do this in decades. If our application is approved, before the independent regulator....

Interjections.

Hon. B. Ralston: You can't take more good news?

If our application is approved, B.C. Hydro rate bills for consumers in British Columbia, for our citizens, will be 55 percent lower than what the old government wanted to charge. We've also launched phase 2 of our review, to make sure it's working for British Columbians.

Interjections.

[10:40 a.m.]

Hon. B. Ralston: I'm not sure whether you'll get a second question, so I want to make sure I give a full answer.

In our review, we'll look at CleanBC's electrification targets, new technologies, new rules for Indigenous nations, and look for new opportunities at B.C. Hydro.

Mr. Speaker: Oak Bay–Gordon Head on a supplement.

A. Weaver: Thank you to the minister for his answer. Unfortunately, to the minister's answer, under his government, the standing offer program under B.C. Hydro has been cancelled.

As a direct consequence of that, a myriad of small companies who have invested millions upon millions have now got lost capital. They are seeking indemnity, and they are seeking that money to be refunded through the court system. This has sent a very strong signal to the independent power producers, the small-scale producers in this province, that British Columbia is not a friendly place for small-scale hydro.

To the minister, what is he going to do to ensure that B.C. Hydro actually steps up and starts to rebuy those contracts and stops trying to squash each and every one of these small-scale producers, which exist in British Columbia already, with some capital?

Hon. B. Ralston: Let me repeat or recapitulate what I said last time. I think it bears repetition for sure. B.C. Hydro is taking a prudent, case-by-case approach to deciding whether to renew existing purchase power agreements with independent producers, ensuring prices that are cost-effective for taxpayers.

As part of the phase 2 review — the report is not yet in; I'm awaiting it — we will be looking at making sure that we meet CleanBC's electrification targets, new technologies, new roles for Indigenous nations, and looking at new opportunities for B.C. Hydro. That final report will be received very shortly. So we will continue this important work while keeping rates affordable for British Columbia citizens.

SOIL DISPOSAL SITE IN SHAWNIGAN LAKE WATERSHED

S. Furstenau: One of the greatest concerns we've had in Shawnigan about the contaminated soil that's sitting on the property on Stebbings Road is the potential for contaminants to leach into groundwater that sits beneath where the soil is sitting.

The soil that was imported to this site in the winter of 2015-2016 had high levels of chloride. Since then, chloride levels in the monitoring well have increased more than fivefold. Shallow monitoring wells were part of the conditions for the final closure plan that this minister ordered and were installed in October. However, the ministry did not require tests of those wells until after the first heavy rains in December. Tests were done December 19 and 20. It is February 18, two months since those water samples were tested.

My question is to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy. Why have the water sampling results from the shallow monitoring wells not been made available to the public?

Hon. G. Heyman: As the member knows, both of our parties share a commitment to ensuring that British Columbians are able to meaningfully exercise their right to clean, safe drinking water and to protect watersheds.

As the member also knows, we spent a lot of time designing the final closure plan for that landfill. I needed to be assured, so that I could assure residents of Shawnigan Lake, that we were exercising every option available to us, under existing legislation, to ensure that the plan was robust, that it would entail ongoing monitoring, additional monitoring from shallow groundwater wells, and include the ability of the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Strategy to alter the conditions if results or any other factors indicated that that should be done.

We're committed to protecting water. As to the results about which the member is asking, they will be posted on Monday, February 24.

Mr. Speaker: The House Leader, Third Party on a supplemental.

S. Furstenau: It's been over eight years since our community has been raising concerns about this site, this company and this process. A small sampling of issues: a secret profit-sharing deal between the quarry owners and the engineers and a court decision by Supreme Court Justice Sewell, who said that this matter struck at the heart of the integrity of the Environmental Management Act.

[10:45 a.m.]

Owners of the landfill site have not paid their taxes, and now the process has begun to transfer the landfill site and the property next door, on which 100,000 tonnes of soil of mysterious origin was dumped over the past several years,

to the province of B.C. Now one of the original signers of the profit-sharing deal is the person today who signs off on the water sampling to the Ministry of Environment.

My question is to the Premier. When he was Leader of the Opposition, he came to the Shawnigan community and said that he stood for protecting drinking water and protecting our community. What does he say today to Shawnigan community members who still do not trust that the public interest is being served?

Hon. G. Heyman: As I pointed out in my answer to the first question, we have taken a number of steps in the closure plan to increase transparency and to be able to respond to any information that comes to us.

To the specific points raised by the member, as the member knows, we introduced and passed a Professional Governance Act to deal with the very issue that she raised about a lack of transparency about interests and conflict of interest, potentially, that arose in the Shawnigan case. With respect to the water sampling, part of the closure plan conditions are that there will always be an independent observer, either from the ministry or a qualified professional retained by the ministry, to ensure that when activities are taking place on site, we have an independent set of eyes overseeing that.

Next week our ministry staff will be going up to conduct additional water sampling ourselves, to increase transparency. And as the member knows, this Friday my ministry staff have scheduled a briefing on results to date and what we're doing with both her, as the MLA; the Cowichan Valley regional district; and the Malahat Nation.

We're committed to transparency. We're committed to sharing information. We're committed to protecting drinking water in the Cowichan Valley and Shawnigan Lake.

FOREST INDUSTRY TENURE TRANSFER IN CLEARWATER AREA

P. Milobar: Turning, hiding and ducking away from issues seems to be how this government wants to operate.

In Clearwater, we have a tenure transfer that has been waiting since May for the community to know what is happening. For nine months, the community has been waiting to know what the next step will be. In that nine months, we've had 172 job losses and a mill closure, a mill that the Premier, when in opposition — another quote from the Premier back then.... It would never happen under his watch. Yet we've had ten mills close, one of them in Vavenby. In addition to those 172 jobs, there are countless contractors waiting to find out what will happen with the Canfor-Interfor tenure transfer.

A simple question. When will the minister approve or reject a tenure transfer that has been waiting over nine months, to this point?

Hon. D. Donaldson: Thank you for the question. It's obviously an important question for the people in the area around their future in forestry and the future of the forest sector in Clearwater and the area surrounding Clearwater.

I've not received a proposal from Interfor or Canfor on my desk at this point. I have met with local government, I have met with First Nations, and I have met with labour. My deputies are in constant touch with industry. The company has indicated to the ministry that it's interested in working with local First Nations on stewardship and partnership opportunities.

In the meantime, we're attuned to the situation. We're redirecting, for instance, contract work so that local contractors in the area and in the Interior in general can have a chance at bidding on work that will help them in the meanwhile.

Mr. Speaker: Kamloops–North Thompson on a supplemental.

P. Milobar: That's beyond a disappointing answer — or lack thereof. Having somebody deliver a bit of firewood for a weekend is not a replacement job for people in the forestry sector.

The chief of the Simpcw is mad. They're not getting any answers out of this government. Interfor is not getting answers. Canfor is not getting answers. The contractors aren't getting answers. Clearwater is not getting answers. Barriere is not getting answers. The mill in Barriere is not getting any answers.

All this minister can do is stand up and say: "I haven't seen the paperwork yet." Maybe if the minister actually picked up the phone and found out where the paperwork is, after nine months, the uncertainty would actually be cleared up.

[10:50 a.m.]

The people in the valley, the North Thompson, need more than a text message from a parliamentary secretary once every few weeks. They need more than the occasional press statement from the minister. When will the tenure be solved so people in the North Thompson Valley and all the way over to Chase — and Domtar will know what's going on with their chip supply for a pulp mill — know what's going on? When will this minister actually take some action?

Hon. D. Donaldson: Well, the member talks about nine months. The reason we're in the situation we are in the Interior in the forestry sector is 16 years of inaction by the other side — 16 years. For 16 years, they were well informed.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. D. Donaldson: They knew well that there was an overcapacity in the milling sector in the Interior, which results in the kinds of closures we're seeing, and they did nothing to help communities to prepare for that.

As I said, I've met with labour, I've met with local government, and I met with First Nations. You know what? Because we introduced and passed Bill 22 in this Legislature, this is the first time ever that government will be able to have a say around the public interest when tenure transfers are proposed. That didn't happen under the previous government.

CONDITIONS IN FOREST INDUSTRY AND SOFTWOOD LUMBER NEGOTIATIONS

J. Rustad: To show the priority this government has on the forest sector, the Premier ditched going to Washington, with other Premiers across this country, to defend our forest interests.

The minister likes to get up and talk about history. Here's some history. Between 2009 and 2017, there were more than 9,000 job gains in the forest sector in this province, and we saw a healthy growing sector. Since the NDP have been in power, all of that is gone. That has been completely lost. We've seen mill closures. We've seen layoffs. We've seen the curtailments.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

J. Rustad: What has the response been? Stealing \$25 million from the rural dividend fund.

To the Minister of Forests, when will he start to recognize that his policies are damaging and hurting this forest sector and actually start taking some action to support our forest workers in this province?

Hon. J. Horgan: I just want to correct the member for Nechako Lakes. There was a Premier.... A group of Premiers went to talk to the governors, the U.S. governors conference in Washington, D.C., about NAFTA — or the new NAFTA, NAFTA 2.0, USMCA. At the last minute, it was suggested that they could talk about softwood. I spoke with Deputy Prime Minister Freeland about that. She understands full well the importance of softwood lumber and an agreement between the United States and Canada to the people of British Columbia and to the sector.

I know the member understands that. So I want to correct the record with respect to when I went to Washington. He might not remember. I went to Washington the first week I was Premier...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. J. Horgan: ...because there had not been a Premier to Washington, D.C., in a long, long time. I recall being criticized at that time for going. Now I'm being criticized for not going.

We care deeply about every corner of this province. If only the former government had spent half as much time working on forestry as they've done today complaining about it, we'd be in a better place than we are today.

Mr. Speaker: The member Nechako Lakes on a supplemental.

J. Rustad: So the Premier promised that softwood lumber would be the top priority. He goes to Washington to get a cheque from the Steelworkers, and it has been absolutely crickets on the file ever since.

That is unacceptable, Premier.

I can tell you, as the Premier noticed, the impact of this forest crisis that we have is impacting every corner of this province. A little later today forest workers from across the Island and others from around the province — loggers, truckers, millworkers — will be gathering at the Legislature asking the ministry to do something — anything — to be able to help improve this sector.

They're asking for the forest to be protected, for the working forest to be available for them and for their children. They're asking that costs be brought down, instead of being driven up. Policies need to be reversed.

Will the minister commit today to meeting these simple and straightforward asks by the hard-working people on this Island?

[10:55 a.m.]

Hon. J. Horgan: Again, I understand the member's passion. I've been into his territory's communities many, many times since I became Premier. One of the fundamental shifts we've seen is the establishment of timber supply tables — not just in the Kootenays but also right next door, in Mackenzie.

The member will know full well that a way forward after the beetle kill, a way forward with soft markets, a way forward when your largest trading partner puts unfair tariffs in place, a way forward is to work together, to hang together as a community. That's exactly what's happening.

Industry leaders, labour leaders, Indigenous leaders, community leaders are coming together in every corner of the province to try and build a stronger forest industry going forward. I believe that's what British Columbians want to see.

When it comes to the coast, a private sector labour dispute put at risk many, many people's families, and we're as concerned about that as everyone else is. That's why we've dropped stumpage rates. That's why we've put in place restrictions on raw log exports, so we can keep jobs

in British Columbia. If only the braying and moaning on the other side had been real when they were over here, we wouldn't be in this place.

STRATA INSURANCE COST INCREASES

J. Thornthwaite: On February 29, an estimated 2,000 stratas will try to renew their insurance. Some will be shocked to learn that they can't, while others will be hit with massive increases to premiums and deductibles. What specifically is the Minister of Housing doing about it?

Hon. S. Robinson: Well, the rising cost of insurance is an issue that strata corporations are facing right across Canada and around the world. It's not just unique to British Columbia. I want to assure the member and all the members opposite and British Columbians that the Minister of Finance is monitoring the situation carefully, and staff from both of our ministries are talking to those who have knowledge of the market along with the condominium owners, homeowners association and the insurance sector to better understand the situation.

Mr. Speaker: North Vancouver–Seymour on a supplemental.

J. Thornthwaite: According to the *Abbotsford News* on January 7, a spokesperson for the B.C. Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing said: "The province is working to ensure affordable coverage is available." Since then, hundreds of stratas have reported facing massive increases, and 11 can't even get insurance at all.

Will the minister tell us exactly what her plan is?

Hon. S. Robinson: Again, we are concerned about these impacts and about the decisions that are being made by private insurance companies. These decisions are putting significant pressure and creating significant concern for homeowners, condominium owners that are in a strata situation and, in some cases, on renters because they, too, are living in these homes.

We know that climate change and the increase of weather-related incidents is having a direct impact on the cost of these insurance products. We are engaging with the private insurance industry to determine how people can continue to access affordable insurance in the face of these challenges.

T. Wat: My constituents want the government to act now. Dave Hyna writes: "What is the government waiting for — cancelled mortgages, loss of homes?"

To the minister, how bad do things have to get before she does anything?

Hon. S. Robinson: It would seem that the preference

of the opposition is just to jump in and hope that you can figure this out. That's really, I would say, irresponsible. The more appropriate thing to do is to make sure that you gather all the information, which is exactly what we're doing.

The Minister of Finance and my staff are working together to identify the best way forward. We know that people are really concerned. This is an issue that came up out of the private insurance industry. It's work that we're doing in consultation. Maybe they don't understand what that word means. It means consulting with the industry and consulting with the Condominium Owners Association, as well as the two ministries, in order to better understand how to best proceed.

We are hearing the same thing that those members are hearing. We know that it's creating anxiety and stress for condominium owners and for those who are in strata. That's why we're working together with the insurance industry to make sure that we have a path forward.

[11:00 a.m.]

[End of question period.]

Hon. M. Farnworth: I seek leave to move motions to activate three select standing committees and one special committee. The full text of these motions has been provided to the two House Leaders.

Leave granted.

Motions Without Notice

POWERS AND ROLE OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH COMMITTEE

Hon. M. Farnworth: By leave, I move the first motion regarding the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth.

[That the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth be empowered to foster greater awareness and understanding among legislators and the public of the BC child welfare system, including the specific needs of Indigenous children, youth, families and communities, and in particular to:

1. Receive and review the annual service plan from the Representative for Children and Youth (the "Representative") that includes a statement of goals and identifies specific objectives and performance measures that will be required to exercise the powers and perform the functions and duties of the Representative during the fiscal year;
2. Be the Committee to which the Representative reports, at least annually;
3. Refer to the Representative for investigation the critical injury or death of a child; and
4. Receive and consider all reports and plans transmitted by the Representative to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly.

That, in addition to the powers previously conferred upon Select Standing Committees of the House, the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth be empowered to:

- a) Appoint of its number one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee and to delegate to the subcommittees all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House;
- b) Sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- c) Conduct consultations by any means the Committee considers appropriate;
- d) Adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- e) Retain personnel as required to assist the Committee;

and shall report to the House as soon as possible, or following any adjournment, or at the next following Session, as the case may be; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

Motion approved.

POWERS AND ROLE OF FINANCE COMMITTEE

Hon. M. Farnworth: By leave, I move the second motion regarding the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

[That the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services be empowered to:

Examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to the budget consultation paper prepared by the Minister of Finance in accordance with section 2 of the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act* (S.B.C. 2000, c. 23) and, in particular, to:

- a) Conduct public consultations across British Columbia on proposals and recommendations regarding the provincial budget and fiscal policy for the coming fiscal year by any means the Committee considers appropriate; and
- b) Prepare a report no later than November 15, 2020, on the results of those consultations.

That the Committee be empowered to consider and make recommendations on the annual reports, rolling three-year service plans and budgets of the statutory officers, namely, the:

- (i) Auditor General
- (ii) Chief Electoral Officer
- (iii) Conflict of Interest Commissioner
- (iv) Human Rights Commissioner
- (v) Information and Privacy Commissioner
- (vi) Merit Commissioner
- (vii) Ombudsperson
- (viii) Police Complaint Commissioner
- (ix) Representative for Children and Youth

and that the Committee be empowered to inquire into and make recommendations with respect to other matters brought to the Committee's attention by any of aforementioned statutory officers. That the Committee be designated as the Committee referred to in sections 19, 20, 21 and 23 of the *Auditor General Act* (R.S.B.C. 2003, c. 2) and that the report in section 22 of the *Auditor General Act* (R.S.B.C. 2003, c. 2) be referred to the Committee.

That, in addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committees of the House, the Committee be empowered to:

- a) Appoint of its number one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the

Committee and to delegate to the subcommittees all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House;

b) Sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;

c) Conduct consultations by any means the Committee considers appropriate;

d) Adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and

e) Retain personnel as required to assist the Committee;

and shall report to the House as soon as possible, or following any adjournment, or at the next following Session, as the case may be; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

Motion approved.

POWERS AND ROLE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Hon. M. Farnworth: By leave, I move the third motion regarding the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

[That all reports of the Auditor General of British Columbia transmitted to the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly be deemed referred to the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts. For greater certainty, the following exceptions are provided:

1) The report referred to in section 22 of the *Auditor General Act* (S.B.C. 2003, c. 2) shall be referred to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services; and

2) Reports of the Auditor General respecting the Legislative Assembly prepared under the statutory provisions of the *Legislative Assembly Management Committee Act* (R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 258) shall be referred to the Legislative Assembly Management Committee.

That the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts be the Committee referred to in sections 6, 7, 10, 13 and 14 of the *Auditor General Act* (S.B.C. 2003, c. 2).

That, in addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committees of the House, the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts be empowered to:

a) Appoint of its number one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee and to delegate to the subcommittees all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House;

b) Sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;

c) Adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and

d) Retain personnel as required to assist the Committee;

and shall report to the House as soon as possible, or following any adjournment, or at the next following Session, as the case may be; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

Motion approved.

APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW THE PERSONAL INFORMATION PROTECTION ACT

Hon. M. Farnworth: By leave, I move the fourth motion regarding the Special Committee to Review the Personal Information Protection Act.

[That a Special Committee be appointed to review the *Personal Information Protection Act* (S.B.C. 2003, c. 73) pursuant to section 59 of that Act and that the Special Committee shall have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and, in addition, be empowered to:

a) Appoint of its number one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Special Committee and to delegate to the subcommittees all or any of its powers except the power to report directly to the House;

b) Sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;

c) Conduct consultations by any means the Special Committee considers appropriate;

d) Adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and

e) Retain personnel as required to assist the Special Committee;

and shall submit a report, including any recommendations respecting the results of the review, to the Legislative Assembly within one year of this motion being adopted by the House; and shall deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.

The said Special Committee be composed of the following Members: *Rachna Singh* (Convener), *Dan Ashton*, *Mable Elmore*, *Adam Olsen*, and *Steve Thomson*.]

Motion approved.

Petitions

D. Ashton: I'm honoured today to be able to rise and present a 26,000-plus-names petition, initiated by Mick Harper just over 30 days ago, to the Ministry of Transportation to take immediate action to install concrete safety barriers between opposing traffic on Highway 97 between Summerland and Greata Ranch, south of Peachland. I would also ask that Highway 97 from Penticton to Summerland be considered by the ministry for opposing traffic safety separation where deemed necessary.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. Farnworth: I call continued Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne.

[R. Chouhan in the chair.]

Throne Speech Debate

(continued)

J. Yap: It's my honour to pick up where I left off from the last sitting to continue my remarks and, in the time remaining for me, to say a few words, further words, on behalf of my constituents in Richmond-Steveston.

With respect to the throne speech which was delivered a week ago by the Lieutenant-Governor, as I've said previously, this is a speech that, from our point of view, reflects a lack of vision and appears to be a rehash of past ideas. It appears to be a throne speech which implies a government that seems to be tired and out of steam.

As mentioned, there's no jobs plan. There's no vision for how to generate private sector economic growth. In a number of areas, where government had made a number of key commitments, there are no new initiatives to support British Columbians.

One area of great interest and concern for British Columbians, of course, in the area of affordability, is housing — a key part of affordability for British Columbians.

[11:05 a.m.]

When this government first started, there was an effort — and we have many comments made by members of the government, by ministers, by the Finance Minister — about wanting a moderation of the housing market. That is, in fact, what happened. Home prices did moderate, but 2½ years now into the government mandate, home prices are going back up after this modest decline. Generally speaking, home prices, especially in major urban areas, are still not remotely affordable for many British Columbians. Housing starts, a key indicator of supply, are down 40 percent in British Columbia, a drop of 1,200.

In regards to affordable housing and subsidized housing, the government made a grand commitment to build 114,000 units — 114,000 units. A big number. How many have been achieved so far? Well, 2,400 new affordable housing units. At this rate — just do the math — it would take 100 years for the government to fulfil their promise to build 114,000 new housing units.

The throne speech does not have anything. We hope that in the budget we're going to be seeing later today, there will be some support for increasing housing supply. Instead, we're seeing projects to build housing around the province cancelled. We're seeing high taxation discouraging the creation of more housing.

We all know that Vancouver, within greater Vancouver, has the second least affordable housing in the world. Rents are now.... For example, a two-bedroom apartment in Vancouver averaged over \$2,000, and there's continued upward pressure as the supply continues to be constrained and, in fact, declines.

Where is the \$400 annual renters rebate that was promised with great fanfare by the government at the time of the last election? Where is that? This throne speech leaves

renters in a lurch without this promised rebate, and home prices continue to rise after that modest decline.

Another area that was a signature commitment of the government was to create \$10-a-day child care for British Columbians and, more specifically, a commitment to provide 24,000 spaces over three years. You may ask: where is this commitment? Where is it today? So far, the numbers are 2,055 child care spaces created, far short of the promised number.

Again, as my colleague from Chilliwack-Kent has so clearly demonstrated, this signature campaign promise has been broken, one of many promises broken by this government. In this particular area, the government seems more concerned about very lovely photo ops and announcements than with actually creating affordable child care.

As we move forward and as my colleagues have the opportunity to talk about the direction of this government.... We'll have lots to say when the budget is revealed later today, and in the coming days, we will have a chance to have a closer look at the priorities of this government.

Many British Columbians are expressing their concerns. It's not just members of the opposition. Let me share, for the record, a few quotes from observers in regards to the direction of this government.

[11:10 a.m.]

From Central 1 Credit Union, as an example: "Year-to-date retail sales growth was a scant 0.6 percent and is tracking the weakest annual performance since 2009."

Here's another one from the same folks at Central 1 Credit Union: "Households have likely reduced spending, given debt loads, rising shelter costs and increased food prices."

The folks at the B.C. Chamber of Commerce weighed in as follows. Business "confidence in the B.C. economy is declining," with one in two businesses saying their overall confidence in the economy has declined over the past year. The primary reason cited, 79 percent, is that "the cost of doing business has worsened."

One more, also from the folks at the B.C. Chamber of Commerce: "The growing lack of confidence in B.C. as a place to invest, thanks to unclear regulatory processes and the shifting goalposts thanks to the provincial government's actions."

As we look at where our province is, where our economy is, we are seeing signs of continued decline. We have seen the job numbers continue to show job losses in the last number of months. The latest ones show another 6,000 full-time jobs lost. The numbers show that over the last eight months, almost 33,000 full-time jobs have been lost. Clearly, this cannot be sustainable for our province.

As we heard earlier today in question period debate, forestry communities, especially, and other resource-related communities are still hurting. Yet we appear to have a government that continues to be oblivious to the concerns and the hurt being felt in these communities.

As we heard, there are more than 100 mill curtailments

and ten permanent and indefinite shutdowns this past year, under the watch of this government. A really difficult, heartbreaking statistic, when you hear these numbers, about how life has become so difficult, clearly unaffordable under this government.

The throne speech is lacking in vision, without a clear direction on how to get British Columbia's economy on the right track, and a disappointment, from my point of view — I know that my colleagues on this side of the House have expressed similar concerns — a throne speech that is really short on vision and without a direction to get British Columbia in a place where we can have an economy that is affordable for those that the government had promised in the early days when they were campaigning three years ago.

This is a throne speech which I know I cannot support, with the concerns that we've talked about and other colleagues on this side of the House have expressed. We look forward to the government coming out with ideas and initiatives which we'll hear about later today in the budget speech. But as far as the vision, as far as the direction, as far as the priorities, this is a throne speech which, from our point of view, is lacking.

With that, I thank you for the opportunity to make a few comments.

Hon. S. Robinson: I'm very excited to take my place in this throne speech debate.

[11:15 a.m.]

Before I get into my formal remarks, it is the one opportunity where we get to acknowledge the number of people who work with us in order to deliver for the people of British Columbia. So I, too, would just like to take a moment to thank my team in the ministry office. I've had a number of people who've worked with me over this past year: Craig and Molly and Jayne and Daniela and Jena and Christine and Matt and Erica. They work to keep things going and keep things moving, making sure that we're continuing to deliver for the people of British Columbia.

I also want to thank all of the ministry staff that work so hard and so diligently to deliver on government's commitments and government's decisions. They're the public service that work hard, very diligently, to listen to what government wants and listen to the decisions that are being made by cabinet, working hard to deliver, again, for the people of British Columbia.

I also want to acknowledge my two CAs in my community office, Laura Gullickson and Erica Williams, for their hard work in serving people in Coquitlam-Maillardville, making sure to hear what their concerns are, finding access to services that government offers and making sure that life is getting better for the people that we serve directly in our communities.

I also, again, want to take a moment for all the people that keep our water glasses filled and our pencils sharpened, making sure that we're on track here. I know

sometimes it must feel like you're herding cats. So on behalf of one of the 87 cats that hangs out here, I just want to say thank you for all the work that you do and keeping my water glass filled, and I'm greatly appreciative of that.

I also want to acknowledge my colleagues. It's hard to leave your homes every Sunday or Monday to come to this place. We leave our children. We leave our spouses. We leave our friends. We leave our life. We leave our routine, and we come here. It's hard work. Whether you're sitting on that side.... I spent four years on that side. It's painful on that side. It's a lot of work on this side.

In the words of my dad, who used to say: "Oh, politicians. They're over there, doing their thing." He never really appreciated how hard we work and the sacrifices we make. He no longer speaks ill of the work that we do, because he's come to appreciate the relentlessness and the commitment it takes for all of us to get elected to this place and for all of us to continue every day to support the people that we represent. I want to thank all of my colleagues for their hard work.

I want to thank our spouses. I know that the Premier got up earlier to acknowledge his spouse and what she had to put up with today. I know that all of our spouses sacrifice so much. None of them ever expect what the Premier got today, and no one should ever expect that. But I know that all of our partners feel the loss of us being there and doing life together with them on a day-to-day basis, so I want to thank all of the spouses and the families for their commitment. That's a really important sort of acknowledgment.

One last acknowledgment here is to acknowledge the CASA folks who signed on and the independent member. It's been an interesting couple of years to work with them and to identify how we can work together to deliver for British Columbians — philosophically, as a family therapist, really believing that when we come together we actually create better outcomes for everybody.

That's, I think, been a valuable exercise that demonstrates what's possible when you decide to work together. I think that we need to keep moving forward with that philosophy. It's a value that I have, and I think it's a value that British Columbians have. British Columbians want people to work together to have better outcomes for everybody.

I'm proud to join with my caucus colleagues to support the throne speech and the work that we started 2½ years ago and the work that makes a difference in the lives of British Columbians every day. It's the work that we're continuing to do to fix the problems that were identified, frankly, years and years ago, and no action was taken. No significant action was taken in order to address that.

We set on a path, 2½ years ago, that would lay out a better course to make life more affordable for British Columbians, to provide services that make life better for British Columbians and to have a strong, stable and resilient economy that works for British Columbians. This throne

speech continues on that very good work that we started 2½ years ago.

[11:20 a.m.]

It's also a throne speech that continues to put people first. For us on this side of the House, it's always about people. I think it's really important to qualify what we mean by people — which people? — because there are many people. This is a diverse province. It's really making sure that it's people from all walks of life, not just the people at the top but the people at the bottom, too, the people in the middle, the people in the bottom middle and the people in the top middle. It's everybody.

Everybody needs to be brought along. Everybody needs an opportunity for affordability. Everybody needs to be able to access services, and everybody needs to be able to participate in the economy, because we are better when we are able to do that. We know that. I know that everybody in this chamber knows that.

I still think about the people on the campaign trail. I have sort of internalized their voices about what I heard, and there are still two people that stand out for me today. It was the young couple.... It was the very last house that I knocked on. It was just before election day. Again, it was a young couple that were living in his parents' or her parents' — somebody's parents' — basement. They live in my neighbourhood. They are educated, they have jobs, and they are saying: "We can't afford housing."

Now, this was in 2017, so this is a problem that has been ongoing for well over a decade before we took government. It's a problem that was picking up speed under the previous government, and it was continuing to soar into the stratosphere. It was seriously impacting this couple. It was seriously impacting the economy. It was seriously impacting the ability for our children to raise our grandchildren in this province.

The other person that I think about, as I think about all the work that we're doing, was an older gentleman who I suspect probably paid off his house a number of years ago. It was a late afternoon when I was knocking on doors. He was out there trimming his hedge. He was up on a ladder. He had white hair so made me think he was older, but now that I'm in that club, I'm not so sure how old he was. But I will assume that he was probably retired.

I asked him what the most important issue was for him in the upcoming election, and he said child care. I thought: "He's an older gentleman, likely retired. Why would he care about child care?" I made the assumption that he probably didn't have small children. I asked him that, and he said: "No, no, no. I don't have any small children, but my daughter does. She's a teacher, and her husband works full-time, has a small business. She's getting ready to go back to work. She's just had her second child, and they can't afford child care. In fact, they can't find child care."

I thought it was just really interesting, because here was a grandfather who was saying child care was the most important issue for him because his daughter couldn't find

child care. I also suspect that he didn't want to be one of those grandparents having to care for grandchildren all week long, that that just wasn't in the cards for him.

Those two people have just stayed with me for the last 2½ years as I think about where we're going as a government, as I think about the investments that we're making and about how those two families will benefit by what we are doing.

I also think that governments make choices. In fact, I don't think that; I know that. I know that they make choices. We have chosen to invest in the things that matter to people, and that means affordable child care and housing. I think it's important to recognize, and I think all members in the House now recognize, that these aren't just social programs; these are economic programs. This is about building a strong, resilient, stable economy. These are economic actions that our government is taking to build British Columbia.

The previous government didn't do that. They weren't interested in those issues. In fact, if I recall, they were saying things like: "We don't need to worry about child care because there's child care all around this province, because women can just stay home with children." I think that was the critic who said that, which is very disappointing.

As a parent, I needed child care for my kids. I had a career. Government had invested in my post-secondary education, subsidized it, and it would be a shame to not put it to good use and help to build this province. But if we didn't have access to child care, there was no way that I could add value — that the return on investment, investing in me, would play out for this province. So child care is an economic benefit to this province.

[11:25 a.m.]

Of course, with housing.... If our young people can't find housing that meets their needs, if they can't make sure that they can put down roots and raise their families, they're going to leave. What does that mean for our economy? Again, we're investing in young people all the time: the largest investment in public education in this province's history, under this government.

We're investing in post-secondary education like there's no tomorrow, making sure that young people have access to skills training and making sure that they have access to a good education so that they can contribute. If they can't find housing, they're going to take their talents, they're going to take their expertise, they're going to take their education — education that we invested in — and they're going to leave.

We can't allow that to happen. We need to continue to do the work that we started. I'm very proud of the work that we started to do on these two files. Through partnerships, we are continuing to build housing in this province. Through partnerships with non-profits, municipal governments, First Nations and businesses, we are working together to deliver on our commitment of 114,000 homes for British Columbians. That includes

homes for middle-income families, like that couple that was in the basement of their parents' house.

We're doing that work because we started the housing hub. It just got going about a little over a year ago, and there are people clamouring to work with our government to make sure that we can deliver homes for middle-income families. We're working together with Indigenous communities, building homes for Indigenous communities on and off reserve. We recognize that in order for people to find a place, to find a sense of belonging, they need to be able to live at home, no matter where their home is in British Columbia.

We're still the only province that is doing that. It was under this government. We need to keep delivering on that commitment, and we are continuing to deliver on that commitment. Our government's speculation and vacancy tax is turning empty homes into homes where people live. We're actually seeing people move in, and 11,000 more units came on the market because of those actions. That's incredible, and that's what happens when you have a 30-point plan and a ten-year commitment. You push through. You deliver on all the components. I'm so proud to say that we are making movement on every single one of those.

This year we're going to continue to act on the recommendations of the Rental Housing Task Force. They made a series of recommendations about how to provide security for renters; for landlords as well. We started an enforcement unit so that people know that when they get an enforcement order, it's carried out. We increased funding to the residential tenancy branch. There used to be huge waits to get any help. We are making progress, because those wait times are dropping significantly.

This is what happens when a government makes choices to invest in people, making sure that the services are there for them when they need them. We're going to continue to do that. We have 23,000 homes open, under construction and in the development approval process. We did that in just over 2½ years.

Just to give you a frame of reference — I think people need to understand what the frame of reference looks like — there were 22,000 homes under the previous government, but that was under 16 years. We have surpassed that, and we are 2½ years into government. We need to keep that up, because that's how you deliver for people in British Columbia. We are seeing a drop in foreign and domestic speculation. We are seeing the moderation in home prices in the Lower Mainland, something that we hadn't seen for a decade.

The previous government was gleeful about rising home prices. In fact, I remember Christy Clark telling people to just move out: "Just move to other parts of B.C. where there might be some opportunity for you." That's not an appropriate response. That's not an appropriate response to people suffering.

It means rolling up your sleeves and getting to work.

It means working with partners, working with the Urban Development Institute, working with UBCM, working with the homebuilders association, working with the advocates, working with the B.C. Non-Profit Housing Association, working with Indigenous communities, working with everybody, having everybody at the table so that we can identify the path forward.

[11:30 a.m.]

That's what this government is about, and that's what this throne speech is about. It's about continuing to do the work to identify the solutions, which are challenging solutions. No one is saying that these are easy. But it really means that by working together, we can find a path forward.

Now, like I've said before — and I'll continue to say it — the housing crisis wasn't created overnight, and it won't be fixed overnight. Our government is determined to fix the problems. We are focused on that and diligent about that.

I need to say that when I think about the 23,000 homes that are sort of in progress — several thousand of them open, 7,000 or so under construction — I think about what happened in 2001, which was the last time that the B.C. Liberals took office, and what happened to all the housing projects that were in the pipeline. We have a lot of projects in the pipeline. And so I've been digging a little bit to find out what happened to all the projects that were in the pipeline. They cancelled every single project. They cancelled every single subsidized housing project that was in the pipeline in 2001.

I don't know who does that. Well, actually, I do know who does that: those people over there. That's a real challenge, and it means that we need to make sure that we continue to work hard to deliver. We need to make sure that we're delivering for those who are most vulnerable in our communities.

I have a story, and I know that there are some members here from Richmond who might appreciate hearing this particular story. I had the opportunity to visit subsidized housing, some of the modular housing in Richmond. It was a relatively contentious build in Richmond, and kudos to the Richmond council for working together with us to deliver on this housing.

I met a woman named Joanne. Joanne offered to provide a tour to a number of design students that were at Kwantlen University who had to design, for their project, housing for someone who was formerly homeless. I said: "Well, we can actually show you one." And Joanne offered to show us her little apartment. I had been to a number of these, because we've opened over 2,000 of these in the two years that we've been working on that. I had seen many empty ones. I'd seen them furnished. I'd seen them with welcome signs. But I hadn't seen them actually lived in. This was my first opportunity to see one where somebody actually lived there.

Joanne invited us in. I thanked her for hosting us, and I walked in. This place is about 250 square feet or so. It's

really small, but it has a bed and a little side table. It's got a little round table with a couple of chairs, and then there's a wall with a bit of a kitchen — you know, a small fridge, a microwave, two burners, a small counter. And then there's a full washroom and a closet.

What struck me, first of all, was how spotless this place was. It was absolutely spotless. Then it was the row of boxes of cereal and crackers that were on the counter. Then she had stencilled over her bed: "Love you to the moon and back." And I started to feel *verklempt*, weepy, because she had turned this modular unit into a home. It looked like a home, and it felt like a home. When I thanked Joanne for having us, she said: "No, I want to thank you and your government, because before I had this home, I was living in the stairwell of the Vancity on 3 Road."

For me, it was so telling about where we had started and where we were coming to. This was making a difference to Joanne and thousands like her since we formed government. We need to keep that up, and we are going to keep that up. This throne speech speaks to how we are going to continue to drive the housing agenda, because it is the most important thing that I think we can do as government.

Now, I want to switch tracks a little bit and talk about child care. That's the other economic issue that I think is most important to this government and, I think, to the people of British Columbia. Past governments really have not helped parents find the child care they needed to move forward in their lives, to participate in the economy, and we've taken some very significant steps in making quality child care more affordable and available to more families.

[11:35 a.m.]

We know that people are starting to feel the difference. Child care costs have been reduced by hundreds of dollars a month. More parents can now participate in the workforce, and people can feel confident knowing their children are receiving high-quality care from early childhood educators.

I remember the angst of being a new parent and the child care challenges. As human beings, our most precious thing is our children. So we need to make sure, as a government — we are making sure — that we're investing in early childhood educators, that we are paying them more, making sure that they're getting the education they need, because they are early childhood educators.

They are taking our children and helping them learn — learn about the world, learn about relationships, learn about taking care of themselves. These are all important things. If I'm going to participate in the economy, I need to know that my children are safe and secure and that they have a safe place to go and an opportunity forward.

I'm very proud in my community. I wanted to find out more specifically what's been going on in the Tri-Cities, because when you represent Coquitlam-Maillardville, our boundaries are.... They're false boundaries. They're electoral boundaries. It's not how people, certainly in the Tri-

Cities, live. We will use PoCo resources or Port Moody resources if you live in Coquitlam.

I just wanted to get a sense, and so I asked for some numbers, because I think it's important for people in the Tri-Cities to understand the millions of dollars that we're spending through the Childcare B.C. plan. It's programs like the child care fee reduction initiative and the child care operating funds and others that we have.... Well over \$30 million in the Tri-Cities has been invested — \$30 million, just in the Tri-Cities — so that families have access to quality child care when they need it.

That investment has never happened in the Tri-Cities. It means that that grandfather I talked to who was worried about his grandchildren getting quality care so that his daughter can continue to teach.... Remember, we need teachers. This is how an economy works. You invest in people, and then people invest in all kinds of things, including child care. It's important we make sure that for all those things that are connected, we understand how they're connected and that we invest in them. That's what's absolutely critical here.

The throne speech outlined the work ahead to make sure that even more families can get quality child care, funding over 10,000 new child care spaces, with more to come. Fee reductions and the affordable child care benefit are putting more money back in families' pockets. Looking forward, an increase in the number of spaces for school-aged children and more before- and after-school care.

I am so proud of what our government has done so far. Again, I keep saying to people in my community, who are so appreciative of the efforts that we're making, so appreciative of the steps that we're taking: "You can't fix 16 years of neglect in two years." It's just impossible. We have a lot of work to do, but I am eager. This throne speech demonstrates how eager we are. My colleagues are eager to keep up the work that we started, to keep improving services, to keep addressing affordability and to keep a strong and resilient economy going.

I want to switch gears a little bit to talk about schools and education, because that's another issue that's really important in my community. Our government is making record investments in education, with more support and better learning environments for students. We have funded more than 80 school capital projects, including seismic upgrades, school replacements and land purchases for future schools. We've hired thousands of teachers, education assistants, special education teachers, teacher-psychologists and counsellors.

For the first time, children and youth in care will be recognized with a new funding supplement, and funding will be expanded for children with mental health challenges and children from low-income families, because our government recognizes that these children already start out disadvantaged, and we want to give them every opportunity. That's what it means to invest in people.

[11:40 a.m.]

Now, the other issue that is a high priority in Coquitlam-Maillardville that I've heard from constituents is, of course, health care, and I suspect that's right around the province. Since July 2017, we have moved forward at record-breaking speed on new hospitals, urgent and primary care centres and hip and knee clinics in communities right around the province.

We've improved wait times and diagnostics in all regions of the province, and we continue to increase staffing hours in residential care homes so seniors can get the care that they deserve. We're recruiting more doctors and nurses and opening up more training seats for health care assistants and specialist positions so that people can get better, faster health care closer to home.

Now, I have another story, about a fellow named Ken who doesn't quite live in my constituency, but he lives in Coquitlam. He came up to me. He's not a New Democrat. I don't think he's ever voted New Democrat in his life, and he's not likely to vote New Democrat. But that's okay. I still like Ken. He's a nice man. I think right now he might be voting Green, but I'm not sure who he is voting for.

He came up to me and said he'd hurt his knee. He recently retired. He figured he would have to wait months and months to get his MRI. He was blown away that in six weeks, he had an appointment. He said: "I don't know what you guys are doing over there, but I know that my life is better because you're doing something different."

To me, that's what it's about. It's about making sure that people can get the care when they need it. It's about making sure that people have the opportunities to fully participate. It's about making sure that families get the supports that they need. It's making sure that seniors can live their lives in dignity. It's making sure that our children have the opportunity to be the best they can be.

I am so proud of our government's investments. I am so proud of the work that we started and the work that we're continuing through this throne speech. I look forward to continue delivering for the people of British Columbia.

T. Shypitka: It gives me great honour and privilege to speak to this fifth session of the 41st parliament in my response to the throne speech.

Before I do that, however, I'd like to give some gratuitous remarks and some recognitions to some of the folks back in Kootenay East and some of them here in the precinct in Victoria.

First, I'd just like to thank my CAs, Heather Smith and Christy Wheeldon, who are basically the rock and the foundation of my constituency office. They do all the heavy lifting. They serve any and every person that comes into the office. Their job is tough. There's a lot of laughter, and there's a lot of tears in our office. But their hearts are in the right place, and I couldn't do it without them.

Also my LA, Krystal D'Sa, here in Victoria, keeps me on track. That's a full-time job for many, but she does that by splitting that up with about three or four other people like

me. She does a lot of hard work as well, and I'd like to recognize that.

My researcher Ryan Mitton and communications Doug Secord do an incredible job, and they're always there at a moment's notice to give me what I need.

In the standard of the throne speech tradition, I would like to recognize a few constituents that have passed away and who will be greatly missed and who resonated strongly at my constituency office in Cranbrook.

My uncle, Robert Shypitka, who passed away on December 28 due to ALS, will be sorely missed. Keith Detling, a former assistant's husband who just recently passed will be sorely missed. His celebration of life will be this weekend. I'll be attending. Corrine and Casey Hanemayer, who passed tragically a little while ago; Phoebe Gwen Bridge; Bruce Calder; and one of my old-time friends, Joan Poweska, who was strong in the community for many, many years. She had many friends. There are others, but those are just some of the few that have been taken from us. We'll be missing them greatly.

On a little bit of a brighter side, some notable birthdays and anniversaries. Well, we saw the anniversary of Hugo and Marion Hess, who celebrated 65 years of marriage.

[11:45 a.m.]

That amazes me, because I couldn't even imagine being married for 65 years. It's a long time. I started late, so I'd have to be probably about 100-some-odd-years old. So I'm never going to see that one.

One of my favourite birthdays was the birth of my grandson, my first grandson, Hudson Shypitka, which was really awesome. He was born on November 9. He is three months old, just over now, and I look forward to seeing him here in the future. They reside in Kelowna.

My family, of course. Carrie, my wife, first and foremost. She is definitely the rock in our relationship. She keeps an even keel in the family, takes care of the kids, doesn't go to a lot of the events that I go to. That was a deal we worked out. She's honouring that deal, and she's doing a great job with the family back home. My mom and dad, Keith and Lynne. They're watching right now. They're very strong supporters and have always been. I thank them and love them for that.

My son Dustin, my son Adam and my daughter Allie, of course — the loves of my life. I'm sending them all the best. My son lives in Kelowna, as I mentioned. My brother Brent and his wife, Michelle. Of course, last and certainly not least, all the constituents of Kootenay East, all 40,322 of them. Thank you for your support, and I look forward to representing you in the future.

As a first-term MLA, the time has gone really fast here. I was actually quite shocked when I thought about this throne speech and thought that this is the fourth.... Well, it's the fifth throne speech actually. It's the fourth throne speech given by this government. It gives me an honour and a privilege, as I mentioned, to speak to this

fourth throne speech. It just amazed me at how fast time has gone by.

I would think that if I was in government.... Normally, when you're giving your fourth throne speech, this would be a time of jubilation and recognition of work that you've done and the betterment that you've created for the constituents of the province. Maybe an "I told you so" that our plans have come to fruition and this is what it looks like, but I'm not really seeing any of that in this throne speech.

As a matter of fact, it's quite the opposite. It sounded awfully like the first three, to tell you the honest truth. I even know some colleagues of mine.... I won't mention who they are, but they looked at this throne speech and they, more or less, used the same ones that they used for the first three, because it's in response to the same exact things.

They're all good things on the outside. We're addressing issues like affordability, health care and education. As the minister before me said, it's about people. Of course, it's about people. That's our job — to provide services and to make life better for people.

But it's long on rhetoric and short on vision. I listened to the minister's speech before this, and she spent as much time blaming government as she did on giving her own government accolades on what they've done. To fill time, and she never even filled the 30 minutes that she'd been given, she spent, as I said, half the time blaming and not enough on crediting their own government for what they've done.

I just find that amazing that you'd be given 30 minutes to speak on what your government has done, and it was filled with rhetoric and blame. That challenges me sometimes when I say that. I don't think it's responsible for government to be doing that.

I'll be short on time here. I'll probably be cut short halfway through here. But I'll start a little bit on what I've heard from the first four throne speeches and the broken promises, and there are many of them — many of them were very heatedly debated when I was running as an MLA with people that ran for the NDP and people that ran for the Green Party.

Some of the arguments that I got in over these exact promises that the government promised to give British Columbians.... They failed to do so. Call it foreshadowing. Call it a crystal ball, but most of these promises that I'll speak to are kind of no-brainers. It's that they were just election promises and only that, never really intended to fulfil the actual mandate of what they set out to do.

We'll start with some of the big platform speeches. It was all on affordability for the NDP. The NDP was great at identifying an issue we all struggle with, but actions are stronger than words.

[11:50 a.m.]

We'll talk about affordability at first. This is a key fundamental issue in the throne speech. According to the

Demographia International Housing, Vancouver is now the second most unaffordable market in the world. This is not addressing affordability. You think you'd be ratcheting that down, not up. The NDP have introduced 19 new or increased taxes, close to \$6 billion, for taxpayers. That's weighing on the affordability of this province. When you issue those kinds of taxes, that is not making life more affordable, it's going the other direction.

The MSP. We'll talk a little bit about that. The largest tax cut, they say, in B.C. history. I challenge that — largest tax cut. By definition, a tax cut is when you take a tax and reduce it from surpluses or from revenue from government — when you take a tax and you cut it — and that, in turn, is less tax to the taxpayer. That's what a tax cut would be.

We had a \$2.7 billion surplus in our last budget. We were going to provide a tax cut to the MSP which was just over \$1 billion out of that \$2.7 billion, and that was it. What this government has done is taken the MSP.... They've eliminated it, but instead of giving relief to the taxpayer, which a tax cut would provide, they've implemented another tax, actually a higher tax overall, which is the employer health tax.

This affects not-for-profit organizations, mental health services, police and fire services and chambers of commerce. They've all said that this is going in the wrong direction. So when you increase the employer health tax to these types....

Of course, businesses. Let's not forget businesses. Some of our main employers, employers that keep this province running, that keep people employed, are being negatively impacted by the MSP, which not only hurts jobs but creates less competitiveness in a global marketplace because of these taxes, this layering of taxes. This is one of 19. There are many more, and I can speak to that as well. This is making our affordability less, not better.

I want to go into a bunch of them, but noting the hour, we're close here. I can go in, but I would like to reserve my right and my place in the debate and move adjournment of the debate at this point.

T. Shypitka moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. S. Robinson moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:53 a.m.

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