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THE HONOURABLE RAJ CHOUHAN, SPEAKER

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LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Her Honour the Honourable Janet Austin, OBC

SECOND SESSION, 42ND PARLIAMENT

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THURSDAY, APRIL 15, 2021

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

### Routine Business

Prayers and reflections: P. Alexis.

[10:05 a.m.]

### Introductions by Members

**K. Greene:** I hope that everybody can join me in wishing my dad a happy birthday.

He's a proud dad of three adults but now seven grandchildren. I know some of his most precious times are when he's able to provide child care. My son has been, for years, going out to Grandpa's garage and banging things around, using the tools and making big pieces of wood into small pieces of wood.

I hope everybody can wish him a happy birthday. It's the first year that I think he's been very excited to get older. He's getting his vaccine in three days.

Happy birthday, Dad.

### Introduction and First Reading of Bills

#### BILL 2 — PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE AMENDMENT ACT, 2021

Hon. D. Eby presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Public Interest Disclosure Amendment Act, 2021.

**Hon. D. Eby:** I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

I'm pleased to introduce the Public Interest Disclosure Amendment Act, 2021. This bill makes several amendments to the Public Interest Disclosure Act, or PIDA, which is British Columbia's public sector whistle-blower protection legislation.

PIDA was first brought into force on December 1, 2019, and it currently applies to government ministries and independent offices of the Legislature. Government has publicly committed to expand PIDA's scope of coverage to apply to other organizations in the broader public sector by 2024.

Built on lessons learned over the first year and a half of PIDA's implementation, these amendments are designed to support that expansion effort by expanding legal protections, aligning statutory roles and responsibilities and ensuring clear and consistent interpretation of existing provisions.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, the question is first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

**Hon. D. Eby:** I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 2, Public Interest Disclosure Amendment Act, 2021, 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)

#### CREATIVE INDUSTRIES AND ROLE OF ARTS AND CULTURE

**T. Wat:** In the film *Dead Poets Society*, the late Robin Williams remarked: "Medicine, law, business, engineering: these are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life. But poetry, beauty, romance, love: these are what we stay alive for."

In a few short lines, he captures the value of the arts in our society. As we are surrounded by the natural beauty of our province, it is easy to see why B.C. has never been short of artistic and creative visionaries.

Here in B.C., we are marking Creative Industries Week, a week in which we celebrate and recognize the many creative industries and the thousands of people who have and who continue to be the driving forces behind B.C.'s arts and culture scene. B.C. is blessed with a wide array of creative industries, including book and magazine publishing, motion picture production, interactive and digital media, and music and sound recording, all of which have brought in billions of dollars in revenue. But the contribution of this industry goes further than that.

I recently rose in this House to speak on the passing of my friend Chang Tseng, a pioneer in B.C.'s film industry, who not only helped put B.C. on the map as Hollywood North but as a community that promotes its multicultural identity through the arts. We are blessed with so many people from all backgrounds that continue his vision and continue to build B.C.'s cultural identity.

[10:10 a.m.]

Like all sectors of our economy, many of B.C.'s creative industries have been hit hard by the pandemic. As many of us continue to endure the challenges of this pandemic, I think we are all reminded of the value the arts bring to all of us. So let's do everything we can to support them and the crucial work they do.

## COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO STABBING INCIDENT IN NORTH VANCOUVER

**S. Chant:** On the third of April, there was a situation in my community that went from horror to heroes in a very short period of time. Somebody was having a very bad day and took a knife to people in a public place. Six people were injured. One person was killed.

However, during that time, onlookers rushed in to help. We had a high school teacher with an umbrella who sent her child to safety and went after him to try and stop him. We had a gentleman who took him by the shoulder and said: “Take this outside with me.” He led him away from other people.

Then the emergency crews arrived — the fire people, the police, the ambulances. They all came. With the uniforms came a calm, because there was a whole bunch of people there trying to figure out what to do. Those people were heroes too. Once the injured were off to hospital, the flowers started coming in — flowers and signs saying “Strength,” “Hope,” “Love.” They started in a trickle, and they became a torrent. We had a quarter of a city block covered in flowers and signs.

Overnight that night the moms of the area gathered together and chalked messages all over the plaza: “Lynn Valley strong,” “Hope,” “We’re good,” “We’re okay,” “We’re safe.” Then throughout the next while, things started to heal. The Lynn Valley Lions and the Lynn Valley Legion came together and started plans for the vigil so that the vigil would be safe for all, so that we didn’t have to do our independent vigils and gather together.

The North Shore Emergency group got together and started a wellness centre. They had it so that you could go to that centre and talk or you could go to that centre and drop your children off for a little while and go for a walk by yourself. They offered many, many things to help.

Throughout the week, each school was tasked and asked to put together drawings from each student. Then at the end of the week, we had a vigil. Fifteen hundred cars went through Lynn Canyon, where there were thousands and thousands of candles, people sitting at intervals — nodding, saying hi, talking to the people that they knew — music, a fiddler.... It was a spectacular thing.

All these things are moving us towards healing. All these things recognize our heroes. I just want to say thank you to all of our heroes.

You stepped up, and our community is grateful.

## 1977-78 BCO MEN’S VOLLEYBALL TEAM

**C. Oakes:** I rise to pay tribute to the latest inductees to the Volleyball B.C. Hall of Fame, class of 2021. The 1977-78 BCO men’s team was the first and only group from B.C. to win a national men’s gold medal. The national club championships were considered the most

prestigious and most difficult tournaments to win in Canadian volleyball.

The team was led by Brian Watson, who, after winning the silver medal, had visions of gold. Five silver team members were joined by seven new players, and with existing coach Ray Myrtle, the team embarked on a journey of champions and had the honour to represent British Columbia in the Canadian national championships.

Team members were from different backgrounds. There were blue-collar professionals and athletes. Al Marshall was a chemistry professor at UBC. Mike Sayers and Scott Murray drove their VW Bug across Canada. Jerry Story moved from Revelstoke to begin his education, and Randy Wagner, the youngest at age 18, moved from Prince George. All shared enthusiasm for the game. As Jerry Story recalls, this was a fantastic group of athletes who learned from their experiences, everyone contributing their personal best.

[10:15 a.m.]

It was the coming together of everyone that made such a great team. Whether you are going for gold, playing for fun, competing as a team or an individual, the positive energy of sport provides lifelong lessons. In addition to physical and mental health benefits, sport builds valuable leadership skills and diverse social connections. Sports bring people together, and we are ready to cheer on our aspiring athletes and our favourite teams and get back into the game.

Congratulations to the B.C. men’s volleyball team hall of fame class of 2021 inductees for your remarkable achievement.

## COVID-SAFE MUSIC STUDIO INITIATIVE AND AMPLIFY B.C. FUND

**A. Walker:** I am pleased to virtually rise in the House to celebrate Creative Industries Week in British Columbia. Every day this week we have highlighted a different part of creative industries and the incredible people who are working behind the scenes.

Today we’re shining the spotlight on the music industry. The necessary restrictions on gatherings have significantly impacted all parts of the music industry. We cannot enjoy in-person concerts or big live music festivals, and it’s very hard on businesses in the recording industry.

Take North Vancouver’s Jim Kwan, owner of Creative-Music Centre. When the pandemic hit last March, it seemed to Jim like music was cancelled. Recordings would be impossible because bands couldn’t be together in the booth. Then he looked around his music school, and he realized he had a valuable resource — separate rooms. He came up with an idea to build 12 isolated booths for musicians, connected into a control room. This way, musicians could record and practise in real time instead of dealing with the lag online. Bands could rehearse again, and choirs could sing together.

He tested the idea in September with the women's choir. As he says: "After they sang, there was this pause. You could feel them all just, like, wow."

Jim's idea was a hit. Thanks to an innovation grant from Amplify B.C., Jim was able to make his idea a reality. Jim has completed his project, and the socially distanced studio is up and running. These grants help people like Jim adapt to the challenges of the pandemic. Or to put it in Jim's words: "Without the grant, we wouldn't be able to pursue this."

To support Jim and the thousands of British Columbians like him in the music industry, this week we announced \$22½ million over three years for Amplify B.C. Amplify B.C. is the province's music fund. It supports the growth of B.C.'s music industry.

I know Merkules music in Nanaimo has received funding in the past through Amplify B.C. This year's funding will help them sustain the music industry and help music companies like Jim's pay their employees, rent and bills.

Creative Industries Week is a time to celebrate B.C. creators. I encourage everyone to check out the activities happening throughout this week.

#### WSÁNEĆ STORY ON CREATION OF MOUNTAINS AND ISLANDS

**A. Olsen:** There is an important teaching in WSÁNEĆ. We are reminded of the teaching through the stories of the Creator, XÁLS.

Landing the canoe at *TXEN*, XÁLS gathered some black stones from the beach, casting one of them to the horizon. The sacred mountain known as *ŁÁU*, *WELNEW* rose up. Putting a few more black stones into the basket, XÁLS climbed to the top of *ŁÁU*, *WELNEW* and created all the mountains that we see in this beautiful place today.

Some *WILNEW*, people, followed XÁLS up the mountain and watched as the mountains were created. When XÁLS had exhausted all the black stones, the Creator turned to the *WILNEW* and cast the most honourable of them out into the ocean. With each one, XÁLS said: "*QENT E TFEN SCÁLEĆE*. You look after your relatives."

Rooting themselves into the ocean, each one of them became *TFE TET,ÁCES* or an island or, roughly translated, relatives of the deep. After casting the last of our ancestors into the ocean, XÁLS turned to the remaining *WILNEW* on the mountain and said: "*I, QEN, T SE SW TFEN SCÁLEĆE*. And you look after your relatives."

[10:20 a.m.]

When you open your mind to the worldview of "*QENT E TFEN SCÁLEĆE*," all the living things that we see today, all the creatures big and small are transformed from our *WILNEW* ancestors into the fishes, the wild game, the

trees, and so on. They begin to look a lot less like resources for our exploitation and a lot more like our relatives.

Whether human or otherwise, when we look after them and they look after us, we achieve equilibrium in our territory. It is a contract and the way we honour the sacred responsibility given to us by XÁLS. It is a wise teaching.

So I ask: are we living up to our end of the agreement?

#### MISSION AND ABBOTSFORD HOSPICES

**P. Alexis:** Today I want to acknowledge I'm speaking to you from the traditional territories of the *Ləkʷənjínəŋ* peoples, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.

As we have especially learned throughout this drawn-out and often painful year, there is nothing more precious than time — time spent with our loved ones, time spent in reflection, time spent living.

I rise today to acknowledge the outstanding work of the Mission and Abbotsford hospices, both of whom are committed to respecting and celebrating the time we have with those that care for us most. Thanks to the tireless efforts of Angel Elias, her team and volunteers, the Mission Hospice has thrived since 1985. Their Guardians of the Gala, delayed by COVID-19 but never stopped, will take place, virtually, on April 23. I have no doubt it will be a resounding success.

Yes, Angel, I have registered.

April 10 saw the Abbotsford Hospice Society's Light Up the Night, Drive Through and Virtual Gala, a farm-to-table takeout experience, featuring online entertainment and a silent auction — a resounding success. Congratulations go to executive director Andrea Critchley for her leadership and the work of her exceptional staff.

The outstanding work of these two organizations is made possible through the work of their employees, volunteers, donors and boards. I commend all their efforts in providing compassionate, high-quality care to people, their families, their caregivers, in celebrating the time we all share.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Member.

A gentle reminder to all members that these two-minute statements should be two minutes. Most of the time, members do take care of that, but sometimes you go overboard. So next time.

#### Oral Questions

##### COVID-19 CIRCUIT BREAKER RESTRICTIONS AND SUPPORT FOR RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

**S. Bond:** Local restaurants and, in fact, restaurants right across British Columbia are barely holding on under current dining restrictions. We've now seen countless media

reports and comments from the sector itself that they believe that the restrictions that are in place will be extended. Hundreds of thousands of workers in British Columbia, especially young people, have been impacted.

Let's take the words of Nikita, who owns a café here in Victoria: "I hired new staff to supplement increased revenue.... I will need to let them go after only two weeks of employment."

My question today is a simple one, to the Premier. In the event that the circuit breaker restrictions are extended, will he commit today to providing additional resources to struggling restaurants that are barely holding on?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** I thank the Leader of the Official Opposition. I agree with her. This is a very difficult time.

I've shared many times in this House that my family ran a restaurant for a decade here in Victoria. I remember how difficult that was at that time, and with a pandemic, it's extremely difficult. Our restaurants have been working overtime to try to make their businesses as safe as possible to ensure that their customers and their workers can be safe, but we've seen an increase in cases.

The provincial health officer has made decisions that impact them. We knew the decision came suddenly. Many businesses had purchased food; some had purchased alcohol. Some had workers that were lined up to be on shift, and they were stuck with some additional costs because of the suddenness of the decision.

[10:25 a.m.]

That's why we introduced the circuit breaker. I'm grateful for the Minister of Finance and the work the ministry has done to expedite that process, to make the process so quick, so that we could get that circuit breaker online. That being said, there are also additional supports that are available for businesses. The small and medium-sized business grant is still available. Since the circuit breaker was announced, we've seen an uptake in applications for that program.

Again, this is just one measure of the many supports that we've put in place to ensure our businesses can go through this challenging time.

**Mr. Speaker:** The Leader of the Official Opposition on a supplemental.

**S. Bond:** While that was a long and interesting answer, the fact of the matter is that the minister failed to answer the basic question. He is responsible for the botched delivery of these programs.

Let's be clear. Lightning speed is hardly announcing restrictions and then days later coming up with a program that requires a business to have 100 employees to get \$10,000. I'm not sure how many restaurants.... I certainly know that in my community, there are very few, if any, that have 100 employees.

Let's get back to the basic question, and maybe the min-

ister can figure out the answer. The question is a simple one. People today have invested their life savings in restaurants. There are people who are being forced to put closure signs. They are closing restaurants across British Columbia. So the Premier needs to listen to people who actually run, own and operate and who hire employees in British Columbia.

Here's what Hassib Sarwari of the Afghan Kitchen in Surrey had to say. Even if he got the full amount of the grant, it wouldn't cover even a month of rent — not a month.

Mike Joss, of the Gorge Pointe Pub here in Victoria, says: "We're \$10,000 down on a regular Friday night.... So as nice as it is, it's a bit of a band-aid on a wound."

Will the Premier listen to what these restaurants are saying, stand in the House today and commit to adding additional resources to support restaurants in the event that the circuit breaker restrictions are extended. A simple question, yes or no?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Again, thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I also thank her for acknowledging that within days we did get a program up and in place to support businesses that had to pivot under short, short notice from the provincial health office.

As I've highlighted, many businesses had purchased alcohol, had purchased food. The circuit breaker was designed to give them relief for the suddenness of the decision that was made. That being said, businesses have access to the small and medium-sized business grant program. I know that the opposition doesn't like to hear this, but it's the truth. We collectively approved the highest per-capita support for people and businesses in this country. We all should be proud of that.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned listening. We have been listening. We've been working collaboratively with them. I can read all the quotes from all the associations about how much they appreciate that work we've been doing with them. It is a difficult time — no doubt about it — but we will make it through.

**R. Merrifield:** Young workers in B.C. just want to pay their bills. They want to pay their bills more than they want a special adviser.

The Premier has given these 20- to 39-year-olds no hope and no funding. The \$5,000 from the government that a restaurateur might get.... Well, that's not going to get to workers when the owner is desperately trying to pivot and just survive.

Steve, from Mitz Kitchen in Kamloops, says: "I spent about \$5,000 last week alone in tables, chairs, patio heaters and daily trips for propane. We have over 30 employees we are also trying to just keep employed, but they're not going to be able to pay their rent."

What money will the Premier provide to help young restaurant workers pay their bills at the end of the month?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Thank you to the member for the question. Again, I have to highlight that we did put in place the highest per-capita support for businesses and people across the country.

[10:30 a.m.]

It's unfortunate. We know that young people will be impacted. We've known that from the beginning. Especially for those that are working as servers, there is going to be an impact.

This week the Minister of Labour announced changes to the minimum wage. I hope all members of this House can support that, because those are the workers that are impacted. Imagine a government that would give servers a lower wage than everyone else. Imagine what that says to young workers when they're working in the hospitality industry.

We have put supports in for people. Workers that have been impacted have supports available between the provincial government and the federal government, and we will encourage them to take those supports for this difficult time.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Kelowna-Mission on a supplemental.

**R. Merrifield:** Well, in order to get a raise, you have to have a job.

The Premier doesn't seem to understand some of the supports that are available. He and the minister keep trying to push the problem over to the federal government.

Unemployed restaurant workers are being told they don't qualify for CERB under these health orders. That's a fact. Paul Hadfield from Spinnakers Pub here in Victoria says that we are impacting about 60 employees. So it becomes a question of how far \$10,000 goes in supporting that number of people. I can tell you that it's not enough. There's a gap in the Premier's supports.

Will he fix it and provide money for these desperate workers?

**Hon. R. Kahlon:** Again, I fully acknowledge that this is a challenging time. It's an unprecedented time. This is not just British Columbia. Every province across the country is dealing with the same issues. In fact, most countries in the world are dealing with the same issues.

That's why we put in the highest per-capita support for people and businesses in the country. Very proud of that. The member may want to look at the labour force survey that came out. So 100.8 percent of jobs recovered from pre-pandemic levels. The average wage for workers has gone up.

I know workers in the hospitality and tourism industry are going through a very challenging time. We know that. Again, supports are in place.

It's not about kicking it to the federal government. We've been working closely with the federal government from

the beginning to make sure that our programs are aligned with theirs. Everybody wants all levels of government to work together, and that's what we've been doing since the beginning.

#### GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATIONS ON COVID-19 INFORMATION

**A. Olsen:** In the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, when the minister and public health officials had daily public briefings, this government had captured the attention of British Columbians. Since then, the government reduced the number of briefings and media availabilities, and over time, many people stopped paying attention.

Since that time, government has faced a worsening communication challenge. Travel advisories have changed from within your local health region to within your city to within your neighbourhood. Groups of ten are encouraged, except for when they're not. Data is released sporadically across multiple resources and timelines. The public is reliant on journalists and experts to piece it together and interpret the data for them.

We are in the peak of this third wave. Hospitalizations reached an all-time high yesterday, and our ICUs are filling up. The concern of variants has people worried and wanting a deeper understanding of the risk that they pose.

British Columbians need our government to increase communication. We need government to be forthcoming and answer the questions directly.

My question is to the Minister of Health. Will he increase accessibility for British Columbians and return to daily briefings?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Thank you to the member for his question. He knows that I'm always open to suggestions and have been in consultation with the Green Party caucus and with the B.C. Liberal party caucus consistently and have often adopted their suggestions and their ideas.

Dr. Henry and myself and other public health officials do not just do daily briefings from Monday to Friday — sometimes written, sometimes in person — but also do, of course, every week, dozens and dozens of interviews, where the questions are selected by the interviewers. We do open line. We do all kinds of communications in order to ensure that the public's questions are answered. We have detailed data that we make available at the BCCDC website every single day that is the basis of the very analysis the member is talking about.

[10:35 a.m.]

What I want to emphasize today is the importance of the public health guidance and the public health orders that are in place. They are in place for a reason, because COVID-19 transmits through social interaction. We simply, all of us, have to reduce our social interaction.

Those orders have been in place since November. The majority of British Columbians, of course, follow them,

but we need that number to grow. I think all of us can play a role in leading on these questions. I will, of course, take the advice of the hon. member and everyone else in trying to do a better job myself in communicating on these critical issues.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Saanich North and the Islands on a supplemental.

**A. Olsen:** Thank you to the minister for the response.

We've often heard the minister and public health officials start their responses with "as the member knows" or "as we've heard many times." British Columbians are asking, members of this chamber are asking and reporters are asking because they don't know the answers to the questions and because they are seeking clarity.

Weeks ago the Premier announced that we were on the right track. Then a week later cases spiked, and the government increased restrictions. We were told not to travel, yet B.C. Ferries increased their sailings over the Easter long weekend. Masks were not necessary until they were mandatory. The potential of a third wave was downplayed by this government, despite experts forewarning it, and now here we are.

The government must regain the trust of a skeptical public. It starts with being accessible, admitting imperfection, and consistent, disciplined communications.

My question is to the Minister of Health. When will the reporters who are awaiting answers to the questions that they've been tweeting about, that they've been waiting for those answers, that they've been asking for the minister to provide answers on...? When can they expect the answers to those unanswered questions?

**Hon. A. Dix:** Every day we receive dozens of questions, detailed questions, from reporters, and we seek to answer those questions on a regular basis.

We provide and have provided briefings, accessibility and direct interviews where we don't select the questions. Reporters do. Almost every week, for example, on CBC and on CKNW and other stations around the province, I do a regular interview, and frequently Dr. Henry does, where we don't select the questions, and we provide answers.

I think we can always do a better job. But here's what I would also say. We have done an extraordinary job — and by "we," I mean all of us together — in an immunization program that has immunized, with first doses, more than 1.1 million people as of Tuesday, taking doses that come from the federal government, sometimes inconsistently, and delivering them in the arms of people. We have set up a registration system for immunizations that has more than a million people registered and more than 350,000 appointments booked.

With respect to public health messaging and orders, from the beginning, Dr. Henry has been accessible, in

detail, to the members of the Legislature and members of the media in providing responses to questions. Sometimes there are delays in answers. I appreciate that, and we try and do a better job. But we're also doing, as you can see, vaccinations, contact tracing, testing, helping people in hospital — the extraordinary work of our critical care staff. We're also doing extraordinary work around the province in helping people deal with the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am very proud of Dr. Bonnie Henry. I think she's an extraordinary communicator. I'm proud to stand with her, and I know almost all British Columbians that I hear from are proud to stand with her as well.

#### HOUSING PRICES AND ACTION ON AFFORDABILITY

**L. Doerkson:** The price of an average B.C. home has jumped a staggering 20 percent from last year. Instead of taking action, the Finance Minister said that she wants to wait "as things rebalance themselves." The same government that said they didn't want to balance the budget on the property transfer tax is now profiting off of this extremely unaffordable housing market.

Instead of raking in record property transfer tax, will the Premier deliver a plan to stop soaring housing prices?

**Hon. S. Robinson:** Well, certainly, no one could have predicted this pandemic and the impact that it would have on our lives and on our economy. I have to say that the low interest rates that were intended to bolster the economy, through the shock, have led to big price increases, certainly for first-time homebuyers, making it very difficult to get into the market.

Our pre-pandemic efforts to moderate the market were having positive results. The spec tax alone brought 18,000 homes available to British Columbians, which was quite significant.

[10:40 a.m.]

There is certainly more work to be done. We won't go back to the way it was before. The people on the other side of the House, frankly, didn't do what they needed to do in order to address a crisis that grew for 16 years unabated because they didn't do what they needed to do.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Cariboo-Chilcotin on a supplemental.

**L. Doerkson:** Again the blame somehow is transferred to this side of the House.

Despite the promises that have been made in this House, a new report from the National Bank says that it will now take young buyers 34 years to save for a down payment for a Vancouver home — 34 years. Now we are hearing NDP MLAs say that they will be "the last generation to own a home." This is happening under the Premier's second term, I might add.

Will the Premier stop these soaring house prices, or will he blow it for all the young people of this province?

**Hon. S. Robinson:** For 16 years — I know that the members opposite don't like when I say that, but I am going to say that — the people on the other side of this House turned a blind eye to dirty money in real estate, which we know contributed...

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. S. Robinson:** ...to over 5 percent, across B.C., and as much as 20 percent to housing prices. That is because they did nothing about dirty money entering the real estate market.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, let's have order, please. Order.

**Hon. S. Robinson:** Clearly, they are not interested in hearing how tackling speculation is making a difference for British Columbians, how increasing supply for families is impacting the market as well. We are tackling supply. There's actually going to be another housing announcement, if I recall, later today.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. S. Robinson:** I invite the members to attend that housing announcement to see what more this government is doing to address housing for young British Columbians.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Shall we continue or just listen to each other? Are we good? Okay.

#### REBATE FOR RENTERS

**B. Stewart:** Four years ago in his first term, Premier Horgan deceived renters by breaking his promise to implement a renters rebate — again promised just seven months ago.

Now in his second term, the throne speech made no mention of a renters rebate, despite the Premier promising it for a second time. The renters rebate appears to be as elusive as a spotted owl in B.C.

Will a renters rebate be in the budget, yes or no?

**Hon. D. Eby:** Let me just begin by saying that it is a

pleasure to see the opposition stand up for renters for once. When I sat on that side of the House and the opposition stood up for renters and they were on this side of the House, it fell on deaf ears over and over again.

That side of the House has seen us introduce legislation to protect renters with respect to renovictions, to give them appropriate access to the residential tenancy branch, a compliance unit to deal with problematic landlords, support through the pandemic unique in Canada that has led to the lowest level of rent arrears across Canada, including all of the provinces.

Our support for renters includes more than 26,000 affordable homes under construction, rental homes under construction. That's more than the last government built in 16 years. If the opposition wants to get into a contest about who supports renters, I welcome it.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Kelowna West on a supplemental.

**B. Stewart:** Well, it's interesting. The math that you're counting and saying that 26,000 new rental properties are under construction.... Frankly, B.C. Housing isn't reporting that. But we can talk about that another time.

With the renters rebate nowhere to be seen, renters are paying more than ever under the NDP. And 20- to 39-year-old renters in B.C. or in Metro Vancouver are particularly hard hit. According to CMHC, renters are paying \$2,532 more per year under the NDP. The average rent has passed \$1,500 per month for the first time.

Where is the renters rebate?

[10:45 a.m.]

**Hon. D. Eby:** When you don't build rental housing for 16 years, this is what happens. Rents go up due to supply. On being elected, our government made a multi-billion-dollar commitment to build affordable rental housing across the province. That is rolling out in record numbers. The member knows that.

The member also knows that in the pandemic, in some of the areas that have seen the biggest rent increases because the previous government didn't build housing, we have actually seen rent decreases.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members. Let us listen to the answer, please.

**Hon. D. Eby:** We've actually seen rent decreases in those markets.

The pandemic has had unpredictable impacts on homes for purchase and homes for rent. Government is responding. There will be another announcement about how we're supporting people to get into affordable housing, again this afternoon — part of our billions of dollars of invest-

ment in British Columbians to address the housing crisis that was created by the opposition. There is no debate about that.

#### AFFORDABLE HOUSING TARGETS AND CONSTRUCTION OF NEW UNITS

**S. Cadieux:** The latest B.C. Housing progress report says that just 3,246 units of housing, under the Building B.C. plan, are actually open today. Only 161 of those are new middle-class rental units.

Can the Premier confirm that the NDP has delivered just 3 percent of the 114,000 homes promised four years ago?

**Hon. D. Eby:** Well, when you take just one stream of funding that the government is putting into housing, then, yeah, you're going to get a smaller number of housing units than the government is actually building.

The member is pulling out just one stream of funding. Let me just give one example of how absurd that number is. Even when you talk about....

Interjections.

**Hon. D. Eby:** Let's talk about housing starts in this province.

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**Hon. D. Eby:** B.C. is on track for 42 percent more housing starts than the old government would have delivered, than they committed to in their budgets. That's 58,000 more homes across the province than the previous government was committing to.

In 2020, we'd already registered more rental units for construction by July than the old government ever did in an entire year. I can go on and on about all the housing that our government is building, that they did not do, that they did not commit to and that they never would.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Surrey South on a supplemental.

**S. Cadieux:** Such pontification from the member.

The minister is talking about the private sector building homes. I'm talking about the promise that the government made to build homes. With just 3,200 homes open after four years, it will take the Premier and this Premier-in-waiting 100 years to meet their 114,000-home promise.

This is according to their very own report, the NDP's B.C. Housing affordable housing quarterly progress report, their own report. According to that same report,

one in five of the units open today are reannounced B.C. Liberal projects.

Can the Premier confirm exactly what date he will meet the 114,000-home promise by — not the private sector, the government's promise?

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members. Let's listen to the question, please. Please continue, Member.

**S. Cadieux:** Clearly, they don't care about the truth. The reality is that one in five of the units open today is a reannounced B.C. Liberal project. If the minister wants to continue referring back to 16 years, he needs to bring that point forward.

Can the minister confirm exactly what date the NDP government will meet their 114,000-home promise by?

Interjections.

**Hon. D. Eby:** Thank you to the opposition for the welcome.

The member was concerned about people not wanting to listen to her question. It was actually the opposition that was yelling during her question. And I don't blame them.

In just three years, our government has 26,067 homes complete or underway, including 6,861 complete, 9,272 in active construction and 9,934 in planning stages. As of April 2017, the old government only had roughly 2,000 units under construction or development. As of February 2021, we have 19,000 units under development.

[10:50 a.m.]

The member also, helpfully, neglects the opposition's opposition to the speculation tax that brought 18,000 vacant homes on to the rental market. Yet they continue to oppose it.

I hope we see more question periods on rental housing.

#### HOUSING HUB PROGRAM AND RENTAL UNITS CONSTRUCTION PROJECT IN MERRITT

**P. Milobar:** It's been an interesting afternoon of revisionist history by the minister.

Here's a question about a program....

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members, wait, please. Let him finish the question first.

**P. Milobar:** Here's a question around the housing hub program, which the minister has been directly responsible for.

Under that program, the developer of the Olympic villas

in Merritt received \$16 million in low-interest loans from the NDP. The developer was supposed to build affordable rental units, but instead, the developer slashed the affordable rental units, the 19 units, out of the development. It still gets the loan.

Why is this Premier giving a developer \$16 million to slash 20 affordable housing units out of his development?

**Hon. D. Eby:** I'm incredibly proud of the housing hub program that was started by the previous Housing Minister, now the Minister of Finance.

This is a program that provides low-interest construction financing to developers in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors in exchange for commitments around delivering affordable housing for purchase and for rent. It's an amazing program. It was wildly oversubscribed. It's a really exciting program. I hope the member stays tuned for that.

I'm not familiar with the specific development the member is talking about. If he has details, he should certainly bring them to me. We don't fund people to bring affordable housing out of a development. It's just the reverse. So glad to hear any information he has about that. I'm happy to look into it.

**Mr. Speaker:** The official opposition House Leader on a supplemental.

**P. Milobar:** That's a shocking lack of oversight by this government when it comes to how they loan money. The project was supposed to be for 95 units. It then got slashed down to 75 units, with the 19 affordable units gone. They don't exist in the project anymore. Apparently, there is no oversight by this government when they go into agreements with developers around projects.

It was very clear. Last year the NDP announcement said that the Olympic villas got \$16 million for just 75 units. The announcement happened after the units were already slashed out of the project. There is no net increase in affordable units in the Merritt area as a result of this loan.

Why is this Premier rewarding developers for slashing affordable rental units from their projects, and why is there so little oversight on a project?

**Hon. D. Eby:** The reason why I'm not familiar with the exact details of that project is because we literally have 19,000 units under construction across the province right now. That's a lot. I'm very reliant on B.C. Housing.

I'm very interested in any information the member has. I'm willing to bet that those 50 units are 50 more than we would have had under the previous government. But we'll see.

[End of question period.]

## Tabling Documents

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have the honour to present a report from the Representative for Children and Youth entitled *Excluded: Increasing Understanding, Support and Inclusion for Children with FASD and Their Families*.

## Orders of the Day

**Hon. M. Farnworth:** I call continued debate, the throne speech.

## Throne Speech Debate (continued)

**A. Singh:** I broke off yesterday having learned something new — that we could speak about our friends that have helped us. Thank you to the member for Delta South for giving me that knowledge. I'll continue with that. Before I do that....

I also spoke yesterday about how baffled I remain by the collective amnesia of the official opposition on pretty much anything from health care to mental health to services for people and even to housing. We saw that again this morning. It was a legacy of ignoring — and I'm being generous here — and being wilfully blind to the housing crisis and contributing to the situation that we're in today. A situation that our government has taken great strides in addressing, as the Attorney General has so eloquently laid out.

[10:55 a.m.]

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

Again, enough of that. Back to a few more people that I really didn't get a chance to publicly thank, and want to thank, that helped guide and helped me along and held my hand along the journey here. Vikram Singh, an amazing, amazing volunteer. Mr. Nanda, Shahzad Mansoor from the Richmond mosque. Kelly Sangha, Bikram Sandhu, Makhan Kandola and many, many others.

I also want to remember some close persons that have passed. Our Lieutenant-Governor spoke about Charanpal Singh Gill. Uncle Gill was a fierce pioneer in social justice. Many of you know that, but many of you may not know that we have another connection. Uncle Gill used to live in Hong Kong, which is where I'm from as well.

I remember in the mid-'80s, when I was studying at university in Berkeley, California. I'd come up to visit some relatives and friends here, and he was one of the people that I visited on this farm out in the Fraser Valley. I remember having some great discussions with him. We disagreed on a few things but had some great discussions. His passion for people, his passion for farmworkers, his

passion for fighting for social justice will surely be remembered. I want to honour him for that.

Another Uncle Gill also passed away last year — Amarjit Singh Gill, my old neighbour on Bird Road in Richmond. Uncle Gill was truly a renaissance man, a man who worked his way up from multiple different jobs. I think he was a security guard at some point, a translator. He worked his way up to become one of Richmond's most admired and successful realtors and developers.

He also holds a really special place in my heart. Anyone that came across Uncle Gill will testify that he would go out of his way to extend his hand to help them. He did so for me in my deepest time of need. He was there for me in my deepest time of need. Sadly, he passed away last year. I want to remember and honour him.

We've all spoken about the difficulties of this last year on numerous occasions. I don't doubt that we'll continue to do so for the next few months. The COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to live in a way that we absolutely could not have foreseen. Many British Columbians lost loved ones, and many weren't able to be there to give support to their loved ones, not only from COVID but also from the twin pandemic of the opioid crisis.

We spoke about that yesterday. It was a solemn anniversary. I'll speak about that at the end, as I've spoken many times before here. Addiction and mental health hold a special place in my heart. It's a journey that I've gone through personally. So I'll speak about that at the end, as I said.

Many, during this time, have suffered isolation and loneliness and the yearning to be together and to bond with each other. We all have that, right? We're social beings. My undergraduate studies were in anthropology. One of the things that was instilled in us and that came out was.... As a species, we wouldn't have survived had it not been for that social bond that we make with each other, that community. That's what helps the human species survive. We've seen a lack of that in the last year, and it's a hard time for all of us.

Some of us are luckier than others. I'm lucky. I live with my elderly father, who suffers from Alzheimer's. It's a devastating disease that progresses really, really fast. I'm really lucky to have incredibly hard-working home care workers that come several times a day to help him. Even though he has been vaccinated, I'm still really careful with him. I'm lucky that he's with me and that I see him every day. Most people aren't so lucky.

I'm lucky that we have a province where the government supports health care workers, like the care workers and the aides that come in and take care of my father and treat him.... I'm so proud to say that they treat him with the dignity and respect that we all deserve and that we all want for our elders. I'm really grateful that we live in a province where, at this hardest time, we all came together. So many of us, health care workers going out of their way immediately.

My friend from North Vancouver spoke this morning about our community strength. That is what I was so humbled to see in our province in the last year — how just everyday people came together and stepped up to the plate to serve each other and to really form that sense of community. I hope that stays.

[11:00 a.m.]

Grocery store employees in my South Asian community, truck drivers.... Richmond-Queensborough is sprawling. I think it is the largest urban constituency in British Columbia. A vast amount of it is farming, farmers who kept food on our tables. Teachers, support staff, child care workers who carried on the important work in difficult circumstances and continue to do so to this day.

Small business owners had to substantially change the way they operated to keep workers and customers safe. In my previous life, before I was elected, I owned a small business. I had a few employees. We had to radically change the way that we operated. We pretty much had to shut down for a few months last year. It was hard, really hard. But, you know, we had people that we were taking care of. We, like many others, stepped up to the challenge and adjusted so that we could do that. That's what I saw in British Columbia.

I think we'll all take that lesson with us. As these days pass, we face new challenges. Every day we face new challenges. Our government, I'm proud to say, has risen to face those challenges and provide not only the things that we need to stay safe and healthy but also the resources that the people of British Columbia need to face the hard economic times that have confronted us for the last year and will continue to confront us for the foreseeable future.

This pandemic is the toughest challenge we have faced in generations. British Columbians have come a long way by looking out for each other. Finally, we're so close to the end, in some ways. I'm in that age group where I'll be vaccinated, hopefully, in a few weeks. I'm looking forward to that day, and I know other people are as well. I think the number was something like 40,000 got vaccinated the other day. Thousands are getting vaccinated every day. That gives me hope.

I also see that sort of coming to the end, that final push, as the Lieutenant-Governor said in the throne speech, is sometimes the hardest. People are tired of all the things, and they may let down their guard. There are new variants out there, so I'm going to, as the government has done, urge people to keep steady and keep going.

Keeping people healthy and safe until we've crossed that finish line and gotten way past it is our collective responsibility, and it's been this government's top priority for the last year. Our government has consistently and constantly been taking action to make sure that we get the help that people need, then to actually create the conditions for a strong economic recovery that doesn't leave people behind, that works for everyone — again, acknowledging that this is an incredibly hard time.

It's an incredibly hard time for people in the tourism industry and the hospitality industry, an incredibly hard time. But we will get through this together.

When the pandemic hit B.C., we were an economic leader in Canada. We were one of the country's fastest-growing economies, with absolutely low unemployment rates and steadily rising wages. Despite the challenges last year, our strengths remain.

As my friend the Minister of Jobs and Economic Recovery stated, we're at 128 percent job recovery from pre-pandemic levels. I'm proud of that. I'm proud that our government has been able to achieve that in these hard times. We've been able to do that by listening to the scientists and by listening to the experts and deferring to them and not letting our political ideology and ideas get in the way.

That's what a good government is. A good government is a government that listens, that's teachable. That's what a good human being is, as well, someone who's teachable and who's open.

We're already seeing positive signs for recovery, but there's so much more that we need to do. In a few days, we'll be introducing a new budget, later this month, that'll show that it'll improve health care. It'll have a space for helping businesses to grow and to hire and to make record investments in infrastructure, which is what we need at this time.

From the day that this government took office in 2017, the focus has been people. Yesterday the speaker of the Third Party spoke about a story and what story we want to tell and what story we want to be proud of. You know, our story, this government's story, the NDP's story, has been a story about people, all about people, the people of British Columbia.

[11:05 a.m.]

That focus has not changed or wavered since 2017. It's steadfast. It in fact became stronger during the last year, in the pandemic, as we faced the challenges of the pandemic. As I said, in many ways, it's been further reinforced.

When COVID-19 first struck, our government moved quickly to provide relief for renters, middle-class families, hard-hit small businesses and the most vulnerable. We've adjusted and implemented new measures to face the daily challenges that we have. In fact, British Columbia has delivered more direct help for people throughout the pandemic than any other province in Canada.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke this morning about supports for businesses. Again, I'll reiterate that British Columbia has delivered more direct help for people throughout the pandemic than any other province in Canada, while at the same time keeping the people of British Columbia safe. Their suggestions.... Actually, they don't really have any suggestions, only questions and insinuations. But those insinuations, in my humble opinion, if they wanted what they want, would jeopardize the safety of people in favour of economic interests.

What we've done has been a measured approach and

an approach that has been working, that has been keeping people safe and has, as I said, 100.8 percent job recovery rate from pre-pandemic levels. We need to keep steadfast and keep going on the route that we're going.

We understood from the beginning that while everyone is affected by this pandemic, not everyone is affected evenly, as has been said many times. Metaphorically, we're all in the same storm but in different boats. As we move forward toward better days, we're making targeted investments to ensure that this recovery, the economic recovery that we have, does not leave people behind, that it works for everyone.

We've focused on people and local communities, and they've been at the front and centre in our minds. Those communities are our partners, and we've worked with them. Throughout the pandemic, we've ensured local governments — who, again, are our partners — could continue to provide services and keep the people who provide those services working and keep them safe. As we turn towards recovery, we'll invest in stronger communities, and that'll be one of our key priorities.

The budget, as you'll see, will make record investments in our infrastructure to keep people and our economy moving. That's what governments do in hard times. Roads, bridges, rapid transit, schools, hospitals and community centres will all continue to be built across the province, as well as houses, more homes, more rental units.

Training programs and community benefits agreements will ensure that these investments support good, well-paying jobs in British Columbia, where they are the most needed. Businesses have suffered throughout this pandemic, and we recognize that and have been there to provide the support that's needed and at times tweaked the supports that we laid out to better serve people.

As I said earlier, that is what a good government does. It is a government that's teachable. It learns and adjusts. We did that, putting out a program responding to the needs of the hospitality industry and the restaurants, and within less than a week, turning around and adjusting a program to offer some help.

Is it going to solve the situation? No. We're in a pandemic. We've been in a pandemic for a year. The whole world has been here. But again, in my humble opinion, we're in the best place. We're in British Columbia, and we've done a good job. We'll continue to do a good job.

Many small businesses had to make tough decisions to close or reduce services to protect their workers and customers. From the outset, our government made it clear we would help small businesses and employees get through it.

Really early on we cut property taxes, prohibited commercial evictions and forgave hydro bills. We introduced tax incentives to businesses to hire workers and make the investments. We'll continue to offer these supports to businesses in this hardest-hit time. We'll continue to tweak those services and those supports that we offer to face the challenges that come.

No one could have predicted this pandemic, so we don't know what's ahead of us. This government has done an incredible job, in my opinion, of taking in the challenge and adjusting and facing that challenge head-on.

[11:10 a.m.]

We've made record investments in infrastructure. These will support a resilient economic recovery, again, that puts people back to work and works for everybody. We've made record investments in housing and child care, and that is also part of our economic development strategy because that helps businesses attract and retain talent by lowering the costs of living.

Child care is a game-changing concept, and I'm really looking forward to the next few years as we implement that. We'll continue to do what we've done, you know, as we come to what could be called the dust of the pandemic, and we're hoping that this will all be behind us at some point.

We've been improving health care to ensure that we're prepared, and we'll continue to do that, to improve health care to ensure that we're prepared for future challenges, by fixing.... We fixed cracks in long-term care that we knew existed and that COVID-19 really exposed. We reduced surgery wait times, and we'll be building more hospitals and urgent primary care centres all over British Columbia — again, a step that really, really helps just everyday people.

We've been making life more affordable by cutting ICBC rates by 20 percent, expanding access to the \$10-a-day child care spaces that I've spoken about, and there's so much more to come in that.

There are a lot of social things that have been happening as well. What we'll be doing is we'll be building more inclusive communities by developing B.C.'s first anti-racism law and reforming the outdated Police Act and legislation to remove barriers for accessibility to those with disabilities.

We've been working hard to protect the environment by reforming forestry legislation. Our whole.... Some members spoke about it yesterday — bridging the digital divide, with new investments to boost connectivity in more rural communities. This is building on the progress made to bring better Internet to thousands and thousands of households. With innovation, B.C. will come back stronger than ever. We're poised to do better, and we will.

When the pandemic hit, we were one of the fastest-growing economies, and when the pandemic leaves us, we will remain in that position. Our strength and our resilience define us. We're a natural gateway to the Asia-Pacific. We have abundant resources that include not only natural resources but the intellectual ability of our people and the intellectual ability of the companies that exist here.

I've spoken here about the innovation that happens right in my backyard, right in my constituency of Richmond-Queensborough, with companies like FLIR, which developed the cameras for the Mars mission.

There are many more companies like that, I'm proud to say, in Richmond-Queensborough — bioLytical, a biotech company that has for years produced inexpensive HIV and hep C test kits that are distributed in the developing world by the World Health Organization. They're developing a rapid test kit. They've gotten funding from the national government, a rapid test kit for the SARS-CoV-2, which is the virus that causes COVID-19. Incredibly innovative companies, and we'll continue to support them.

As time goes on, I'll introduce you to more innovators in diverse fields, right here in Richmond-Queensborough. These are all part of the backbone of our economy, and these are the assets that will help us recover to a more prosperous British Columbia.

You know, as time goes on in the year ahead, the government will continue to help businesses recover from the short-term effects of the pandemic as well. The long-term effects will take some time, but the short-term effects will.... We will continue to build an innovative, sustainable and inclusive economy with an eye to the post-pandemic world. With the pandemic, and before that as well, global markets are changing in ways that offer us significant opportunities.

We have the goods and services that the world wants, and these prices that people are willing to pay will continue to reflect environmental, social and governance aspects of production. All of those three areas are areas that we can offer an advantage in the world market. We can offer environmentally responsible, socially responsible products from a democratically run province. Firms in British Columbia will be able to take advantage of a premium paid for inclusive and sustainable products.

Agritech, a few weeks ago, is already.... We announced some funding for agritech, which, again, I'm proud to say we're innovators and leaders of in British Columbia.

[11:15 a.m.]

Agritech will already allow agricultural food processing and the seafood sectors to benefit from the use of innovation and technology. By embracing innovation, these producers are enhancing productivity, while at the same time, addressing expectations around the world about sustainability and traceability of food products. We'll take additional steps in the next few years to support innovation and technology.

I started yesterday, this speech, with the recognition of traditional lands, where I work and live. I can say that I'm proud to be part of a government that has taken on the challenge of racism, colonialism and the wrongs done to the First Peoples of this land and have recognized that reconciliation has to inform each and every decision that we make.

For the last four years, this government has worked to go beyond these important land acknowledgments and to actively forge partnerships with Indigenous Peoples. We've passed legislation, with the acceptance of all of the House,

together, to confirm the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Working together, we have progressed on advancing meaningful reconciliation. Indigenous languages have been revitalized. Child care legislation has been improved and will continue to improve, so more children rightfully remain with their families and communities. Fundamental human rights of Indigenous People have been enshrined in law with the unanimous passage of the declaration in this Legislature. This hard work has only just begun. We're at the dawn of that. Together we will succeed, but we need to be together in that.

The pandemic, like in many other areas, has exposed many pre-existing systemic gaps in health care, housing and other basic services that disproportionately affect Indigenous People. We recognize that. We recognize that our future must be one where we share decision-making and prosperity with Indigenous People, who have exercised their inherent rights on their respective territories since the dawn of time.

Part of that work is a recognition that our greatest resource is our province, the beauty and the majesty of which I think we're all really proud of, whether it's when I drive down the East-West Connector, looking over cranberry fields, to the majestic, snow-capped mountains of the North Shore — of course, being careful and driving responsibly and not being distracted by those sights, which is hard to do. Or I'm on the ferry to Victoria, as I pass through the straits of the Coast Salish sea, spotted by the lush islands of this temperate rainforest that we all live in.

I could go on and on about the beauty of British Columbia. Just being present reinforces the need. Being present in British Columbia reinforces the need to protect this place we call home. For generations, economic growth in our province has come at the expense of the environment. This has to change. We know we can no longer rely on simple resource extraction to generate wealth on the destruction of the environment. This has to change. The coming generation has spoken loudly about climate change and their concerns around that. This is the one single issue that should unite us all.

Over the past few months in my new role, I've had the privilege of speaking to several classes at different schools in Richmond and New Westminster, to young people. The one thing that young people have repeatedly expressed to me is their concern over their future. Will they live in a world where they can breathe the clean air that we have the privilege of breathing? Every single class that I visited has expressed that anxiety and concern over our earth.

This government is determined to continue tackling the environmental challenges that were neglected for too long, for generations. This year it will continue the work of reforming the Forest Act and the Forest and Range Practices Act to meet the challenges of the 21st century, and with the climate in mind.

This government will continue to take action on the independent report on old growth, which recommended an important new protection for remaining old-growth stands. New measures are going to be proposed to increase access to fibre for communities, Indigenous Nations and small businesses.

Land management practices will be updated to improve forest stewardship and, again, emphasize environmental protection. The forest sector will be supported to move from a volume to value. That's what we need. We haven't had that in British Columbia. We may have had it for a little while. It was taken away, with the increase in raw logs and the shutting down of many, many mills in their communities. But we're going to be making those innovations.

At the same time, we're going to move forward with other measures to protect B.C.'s environment, including improving waste management of plastics. These actions will build on the progress we've already made recently, like removing over 120 tonnes of marine debris from B.C. coasts and shorelines, and planting a record 300 million trees last year. I think we're projected to plant another 300 million this year. That's half a billion trees. That's impressive.

[11:20 a.m.]

Our economic recovery must become an opportunity to accelerate environmental protection. We're faced with a unique opportunity here that we will take advantage of. Central to our plans to address climate issues is CleanBC. It's a plan to create a more sustainable economic future on the other side of COVID-19. It's North America's most progressive plan to reduce carbon pollution, while creating good, new, family-supporting jobs. You'll see that in the year ahead.

I see my time has come to an end.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**J. Rustad:** As always, it's an honour to have an opportunity to speak on behalf of my constituents in Nechako Lakes. I want to start by thanking, of course, the people of the communities in my riding for their continued support in [audio interrupted] represent their voices. Each one of us in this Legislature does our best, I'm sure, to represent our ridings to the best of our abilities.

Of course, we can't do the job without family. I want to take a moment to talk about family, because it's been a very challenging year, as everybody knows, especially with COVID.

My mom celebrated her 99th birthday here just after Christmas. My dad, this weekend, will be celebrating his 94th birthday. We're managing to keep them in their home, between my brother and me. My brother is doing primary care, and I'm coming in to help. We're managing to keep them through this, but it is tough. They aren't able to get out and around. They aren't able to go out to a restaurant for coffee. It's pretty challenging for them. But because we have family, because we're close, we're very for-

tunate in that. It does help them get through some of these challenging times.

I know so many people out there don't necessarily have that situation. I know how much tougher it can be on those families. So I want to say thank you to the front-line workers, the people who are keeping us safe, the people who are doing the work, whether it's in health care, whether it's in the grocery stores or any of the other components of our economy and of our society that help to move things along and keep us all going. I can imagine how challenging this has been with so much uncertainty that's out there.

Throughout my riding, I've had an opportunity to talk to many, many people, whether it's community leaders, whether it is First Nations people, protesters, people who are protesting the protesters, and many faith leaders throughout my riding. Everybody has different challenges, and everybody has different issues. But it made me realize, as well, that although we are all in this together, we are not all feeling this equally in terms of what COVID is doing and the restrictions and the path that we need to take. That creates big challenges, especially when you think about companies.

I'm fortunate enough to live at Cluculz Lake.

Just before I go on further, I can't believe I forgot one person. I really need to thank my wife. As everybody knows, doing this job takes a lot out of you. It takes a lot and puts a lot of pressure on family. My wife has always been there and very supportive. I want to say thank you, especially to her. She has a birthday coming up, too. I might get a chance to talk about that here coming up in May.

As I was saying, I get an opportunity.... I live at Cluculz Lake. It's a beautiful little place in the world. Living right on the lake, you get to watch all of the wildlife. You get to watch things that happen.

Something I'd never seen before happened just the other day. Just to set the stage, I was looking out at the lake. Most of the lake is still covered in ice, but in the area we have out in front of our place, the ice is open. About 20 feet off the shore, a fish came up out of the water. I don't know what it was chasing. It ended up on the ice. There was a little bit of water on the ice. But this poor fish was stuck on the ice, and it was flopping around. I thought for sure an eagle would've come by and had a nice lunch. But it persevered.

[11:25 a.m.]

It could have just a little bit of water for some air, which it had on the ice. But it kept flopping around, and eventually, the sun managed to melt a little bit of the ice with a little bit of the waves. It made its way back into the water.

I thought about that just in the perspective of, particularly, the restaurant sector that we have in the province right now. It is a very challenging time. For many of them, they're just struggling. They're really trying just to keep the door open.

I've got a little restaurant out at Cluculz Lake, and it just serves the local people. There are some people that come

out from Prince George or Vanderhoof to it. It is a very small little restaurant.

They managed to stay open this past year, through this, with takeout and people around the community being supportive of the restaurant. But this latest order that came out has really hit them hard. They were just on the verge of getting some nice weather, just on the verge of having more people come. They don't have a very large patio. They can't service a lot of people. We're not quite in the weather that we are in, in the Lower Mainland. This is really a challenging time for a small little restaurant like that.

The relief program for the circuit breaker will help a little bit. But I fear for a business like that to stay alive. Many of the restaurants and businesses throughout my riding that are being impacted.... A number have gone under. Many have managed to go through because of the community support, but boy, oh boy, it's getting tough.

I think probably the most frustrating thing for them, as well as many of my other communities, through COVID, is that I can't explain to them why the restrictions are in place for them. I can explain why they are in place for the province. But most of my communities have been 100 percent vaccinated. Most of my First Nations have been 100 percent vaccinated.

For a little restaurant out at Cluculz Lake, there are no cases. There are no cases of COVID around, throughout the area. Everybody is following the rules. Everybody is doing the appropriate distancing. Anybody that would come out to the lake is in a bubble, in a group, together. It's not like it's a gathering place for people to go. Why do they have to have the same restrictions? Why can't there be some variance, some options?

British Columbia is a very large province. We're all different in terms of our region and our impacts. I can't explain it to them. It's unfortunate. They struggle on. They do what they can, following the rules, but it is unfortunate in terms of what some of the impacts are for those areas that are following the rules, that are doing the right things with the vaccines going in place and being effective.

I'm registered, now, for my vaccine. I suppose I'll get it probably end of May or into June, in terms of my age bracket. My family, my parents have been vaccinated. But it's a hard one.

In any case, I do want to go on, though, to the throne speech, and I want to start, actually, with a bit of a kudos to the government. Mining sector has expressed a lot of concern around the province. We have not seen a new mine open in four years. We have not seen new construction start, I should say, in a new mine over this period of time.

I had a meeting with the owners of the Blackwater project. They're pretty optimistic that they might be able to start construction here in the next couple of years. They've actually said that government's trying to work with them to get this thing through. They're going to be one of the most environmentally friendly mining operations, in terms of their emission targets, that we've got pretty much

anywhere in the world. It's going to be a very large gold mine. I'm quite excited about that going forward.

They still need one key factor, and they're confident that they're going to get it. That key factor is to be able to raise the capital needed. They think they're most of the way there. They've got most of the rest that's there. But when I talk to the mining sector across the province, that's the challenge. They've got lots of exploration going on, lots of hopes, lots of plans, but investors are not looking at British Columbia as the place to be, as the place to put resources. As the mining sector has said, if we don't see new mines starting up, by 2040 there'll be only five mines left operating in the province.

When I think about the green economy and I think about all of the potential, whether it's electric vehicles or whether it's any of the other components that are really needed, we need minerals. We need our resources. British Columbia has the best environmental standards in the world. We've got First Nations that understand and are employed by the mining sector, and we're not seeing that. I think government needs to really think about that.

[11:30 a.m.]

How do we attract the capital to see projects like this move forward, to be able to support communities and families and be able to support the province? It was sad, when I listened to the throne speech, that there isn't any recognition of that problem, of the uncertainty that is being created in this province, of the cost structure, of the burden of regulations and the real challenge for companies who want to invest in this province. It's not because of...

We want to see a company do well. But a mine like the Blackwater project.... What that will do for the Cariboo North riding and what that'll do for the Nechako Lakes riding in terms of the employment — 1,400 people doing construction, another 1,400 people, direct and indirect, that'll be tied to the project when it gets built.

This is huge for an area like this, and it's just a shame when I think about a number of the other projects around the province that are struggling because they just can't find that capital to build. It's something to think about, and I hope maybe a future throne speech might actually take recognition of what's needed, because as we all are experiencing COVID, every jurisdiction in the world is trying to attract that investment capital. Every jurisdiction in the world is going to try to attract tourism, mining, resources, green economy, etc.

What's B.C.'s advantage? How do we rank when it comes to individuals and companies, investors, in terms of creating those jobs and creating that economy? The answer's not great. It's something that government needs to be thinking about, because as the mining sector has said, if we don't change where we're going, the decline over the next 15 to 20 years is going to be pretty significant. That's a big blow to government revenues, to jobs, to families and to communities.

Forestry, of course, was talked about a fair bit in the

throne speech. I look toward to the chance to get into estimates and be able to go through the questions that I've got. I've got a lot of them. I'm sure that it will be a gruelling process, but as the old saying goes, the devil's in the detail in terms of some of those components.

As I started off with a bit of kudos, I've heard a number of speakers from government, as well as the government throne speech itself, that I've got to give a bit of a raspberry to. That is, carbon dioxide was referred to as a pollution.

Now, I'm sorry. I get what the language and the rhetoric is. Carbon dioxide is an essential component of life on this planet. It is not a pollution. That sort of misinformation out there is just ridiculous. It's ridiculous to be able to do that. It doesn't serve anybody well. It doesn't serve the environmental movement well. It doesn't serve us as a province well. A poor choice of words. That's the raspberry.

I think about, as well, some of the components that are out there. I've been listening to, whether it's question period or other responses by government as well as responses.... One of the things that the Minister of Jobs came out and said was that we have the highest per-capita support of any small business. Well, I'm sorry. That is just not true.

Look at Stats Canada. In terms of per-capita spending support, there are only two provinces that are worse than B.C., and that is Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Every other province is significantly higher than B.C., double or triple what B.C. is actually putting out there. That doesn't even account for the fact that that's just money committed, not money that's actually gone out the door.

It is really unfortunate. I know the media is really stressed. They don't have the sources they used to have, going through this. They can't do the background. I wish there was, I guess you could say, a truth meter in terms of some of these statements, because these sorts of things are simply not accurate in terms of what's being said. There's a little smoke and mirrors and stuff being played to make it sound like it's good. Maybe the members on the government bench and the members on the back bench just eat it up, but they should look a little bit broader in terms of what some of those stats really are saying.

[11:35 a.m.]

The same thing at question period today. I had to chuckle at the Attorney General. He came out and talked about how the housing price increase was all on the B.C. Liberals. I've got to tell you, that is really quite something, to think that the B.C. Liberals have that much influence in terms of policy. I know we did great things. We created an enormous economy, a juggernaut, and the whole economy and people really benefited from that. The NDP inherited that.

A 168 percent increase in Canada in housing over the last 20 years. That is not the B.C. Liberals; that's Canada. The closest country to that was.... The U.K. and France were at 100 percent over the last 20 years, and the United

States had a 54 percent increase in housing. Yes, Canada has done well. Do you know what? British Columbia has done even better. That's because of the strong economy and what we put in place in terms of that.

To say that that's all on the B.C. Liberals is just far-fetched. Jiggery-pokery, I think, were the words that were used by one of the former NDP MLAs. This is the problem. You get so much stuff that comes out that can be deceiving and misleading, so much spin. It's really unfortunate. It doesn't serve, like I say, the people of my riding or the people of this province well to have that kind of stuff.

The throne speech talked a little bit about some additional spending in terms of mental health issues, which I actually applaud. We've got a big, big problem with mental health. I'm happy to see, particularly for youth, that there will be some increase. Now, of course, the throne speech is one thing. We've heard lots of promises in throne speeches in the past that didn't really transpire into actions. Those will be things that I'll be watching. But mental health is a big issue.

I had an opportunity to have a meeting with the Premier to deal with a facility that's trying to go into this riding by the Carrier-Sekani Family Services. It will have 60 beds for recovery from addictions. Many of those, of course, have mental health issues associated with it — desperately needed. I am glad that the Premier is going to make an effort to actually try to overturn what the ALC ruling was so that we can see that happen in this area.

There's something more that needs to be thought about. People are in those situations for different reasons, whether it's mental health issues, whether it's addiction issues. Everyone is different. There needs to be different approaches taken for individuals that go through this. But there's another key component that's happening. That is, quite frankly, crime. Many of these issues are leading to unsafe situations for people, whether it's in my riding, communities in my riding, or many other communities around this province.

It is not right at any time that a person, a woman or otherwise, does not feel safe walking from their car to their office, to their place of work or going back to their car. It is just not right. There are people who are being assaulted. There are people who are being threatened. There are people defecating in the front streets, in front of places. We've got problems. I hate painting that picture, but we've got big, big problems.

Unfortunately, I did not really hear any ideas towards solutions to these kinds of things. As a society, this is a problem. Just simply warehousing people is not the solution. People are individuals. They need individual support. They need programs to come in. Housing, yes, is one component of it, but it's not the only component that needs to be put in place.

Not to mention that we've got communities now that are talking about having to hire security forces to try to manage the problems in their communities, in their business

communities. The RCMP can't handle it because there's such an increasing problem now with crime and with mental health and with the homeless issue. It is worse today than it has ever been. Nobody can deny that.

Having a ministry and a poverty reduction plan, they haven't changed anything. This problem has only gotten worse. I applaud government for saying they're going to be putting some more resources to it, but boy, oh boy, there is a lot of action that's needed. That will be something I'll be paying close attention to as it goes through.

[11:40 a.m.]

It was also disappointing, I think, when I listened to the throne speech.... Agriculture is a big piece in my riding. In the agriculture sector, they just want to be able to get along. They just want to be able to go on and do what they do. They're price-takers, unfortunately, so they have to take what prices they get. That means that whenever there are input cost increases, whether it's carbon tax or otherwise, that hits directly on the bottom line, because they can't just pass it on. But they persevere.

I'll tell you, though. The one thing that I hear about, over and over again, from the ag sector in my riding is really about the changes to allow family to be able to stay on the farms. For many of my farms in my area, the people that founded the farms and their children want to stay on the farm. They're now retiring. They want their children to be able to stay on the farm, and being able to have that second home is a real problem.

I know that the minister has come out and said that she's going to make some changes. But good gosh, this should have been something that was done ages ago. We've got a housing problem. Why on earth are we not allowing families to be able to stay on farms? Why on earth are we not allowing this sort of situation, and just making it so difficult?

I had one fellow who approached me, and he said that he bought a piece of land. I'm still trying to figure this out. He said that when he bought it, a portion of that land was not in the ALR. Now he's trying to build a house on that, and it's come back and said that apparently it's now been added to ALR.

I don't know whether it was a mistake the first time around, but now he can't build his house. He's on an old trailer. He can't build his house, so he's got to tear down this trailer and clean it up before he can build a house. Well, where is he going to live? There isn't rental housing and other things available. The rental housing market in the communities here is really tight. What's he going to do? He thought: "Okay, I'll bring in a fifth wheel. I'll stay in that." Well, he's not even allowed to do that.

These sorts of things are absolutely ridiculous. They're issues that are driven by ideology as opposed to thinking about what matters most, which is the individuals, like the farmer that is working the land. The land by itself is not productive. It's the farmers that make it productive, and they get us our food to our markets.

I want to also take a second, just going back to an issue that I've raised on a number of occasions in the past and will certainly be raising during estimates. That's the issue of forestry roads. Whether it's the highway component that is being beaten up by a tremendous amount of forestry activity through transportation, or whether it's the forestry road, there is a lot of degradation of these roads. It's creating real problems.

I've had a person out in Houston having to travel down what is actually not a forestry road — a regular road. But it is so damaged from the logging trucks that go barreling down these roads that he actually broke his axle in the potholes. I think we need to see some resources that go toward it.

According to the report by the Auditor General, less than 20 percent, somewhere between 14 percent and 20 percent, of the actual asks for repairing these roads are actually getting approved for funding. We've got to find a way to be able to get some more resources into that.

North of Fort St. James is a road that we call the North Road. It goes up to Germansen Landing. It's partially highway, and it's partially forest service road. It is just in horrendous shape. We keep scraping graders over it, but the base needs to be replaced in areas. Approaches to bridges need to be fixed up. The road is just not safe for anybody to travel. Even the logging trucks have to crawl along through this area, because it's in pretty rough shape.

I know that people are doing their best, but there needs to be the understanding that with the additional resource activity happening, there also needs to be the additional investments that come, to be able to help them improve these situations.

For the people in Nechako Lakes, they're an independent group. They're good neighbours. They're really great people. They try their best to be able to get along and do things, but they do need a few things. They do need some help. Things like road maintenance are big issues.

Even along Highway 16, there were five passing lanes that were booked to go into my riding. All of them have been put, now, out in the ten-year plan. Those are safety improvements. Those kind of quality improvements along those roads have been ignored.

[11:45 a.m.]

We've gone from a place where we spent between \$15 million and \$17 million a year in Nechako Lakes to, under the current government, one year was \$4½ million, one year was \$3½ million, and last year was \$11½ million. You compile that together, and it's only a third of what had been spent in the past. That's partially why we're seeing the degradation on some of these side roads — because we're not seeing the money available to do the work — and why we're not seeing the safety improvements along the highway in terms of some of these intersections and passing lanes and improvements along Highway 16.

Now, I get that this is a government that has different priorities, and it is moving its money to other areas of

the province. But ridings should be treated equally; areas should be treated equally. They should see that. There should not be this money being taken away from an area like this, especially an area that creates so much economic activity, to be redirected for political purposes elsewhere. There needs to be those kinds of investments to be able to keep the economy going.

The people in this area help to generate a lot of revenue for government, particularly through forestry and other activity. They don't ask for much, but they do want to see a bit of return and attention to what's needed.

I just want to touch on the hospital in Fort St. James. Once again, it's something that I know the area is looking forward to. It's been promised. I hear that this year we'll get to place where there will be construction, a contract that might be out there and let. I'm getting two thumbs up from the Minister of Health in terms of my thing on this. That's good. I'm really encouraged by that. It's going to be a much larger facility than what it was.

The one big question I've got for the Minister of Health is: how are we going to staff it? We don't have the staffing levels in that community to be able to support that hospital at this point, and it's going to need a pretty concerted effort. That will take time. As the Minister of Health knows, you can't just go out and just hire somebody. It takes time to be able to recruit and bring people in.

There's a large plan that needs to be put in place there to make sure that facility is going to be able to meet the needs within the area without having to bring in people from all over the place for locums. But that'll be an issue that I'm sure the minister and I will get a chance to talk about over a period of time.

I'd just like to maybe wrap up my comments on the throne speech by saying this. If you go back and look at throne speeches for the last four years, they're pretty much all the same. Nothing really has changed.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

A throne speech should really be about laying out a vision, especially at a time like this when we've got COVID-19 and we're talking about recovery from COVID-19. There needs to be this path, this plan. People want to see what that light is, how things are going to go. And that was missing from the throne speech.

There was a lot of talk on a variety of issues, a lot of rehashing of things that had been said in the past. But that was an opportunity missed, I think, by this government, because it did not lay out that path. It did not say how the economy is going to be able to recover. How are we going to be able to compete with every other jurisdiction that's trying to recover, and how are we going to be able to manage through this?

I did have to chuckle at the throne speech that said that as the economy recovers, they'll balance the budget. But I can tell you, if you don't have a plan for significant eco-

conomic growth, that means you do not have a plan for balancing a budget. You're not going to be able to do it by simply raising taxes. You're not going to be able to do it through other methods. You're going to need to have significant economic growth. Once again, that is the challenge I see in this throne speech. There was no plan.

Now, we've got a budget coming out here shortly in the next week. Perhaps there will be some more of a plan in there. But like I say, in terms of a throne speech, for the people in Nechako Lakes, they were hoping to see just what that vision and plan was, their reopening plan — how things are going to roll out, how we were going to be able to position ourselves globally so that we can attract the kinds of dollars and build that confidence that's needed in this province to have a robust economy.

With that, Mr. Speaker, once again, it's always an honour to be able to speak on behalf of my people in Nechako Lakes. It's an honour to be able to represent them.

[11:50 a.m.]

I will look forward to the budget coming out, although I must admit that I don't quite have the same optimism that it will have the kinds of things that are really needed to be able to move us forward in terms of our province. But we'll see when that comes out. And I'm sure I'll get an opportunity to respond to that in the future as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to speak to this.

**Hon. K. Conroy:** I am really pleased to be able to respond to the Speech from the Throne today.

I want to recognize the Indigenous nations on whose traditional territory we are all gathered. I want to acknowledge that I'm speaking to you from the unceded territory of the Secwépemc, Okanagan, Sinixt and Ktunaxa Nations, as I'm here at home in the Kootenays.

It's been a pretty tough year for so many of us. It was for our family as well. I want to start by just thanking everyone for their incredible support when my husband, Ed, died last year. So many of you have been part of our journey of Ed's many, many health issues. No one would have thought he would have died after an accident, falling and breaking his hip at the local lumber supply store picking out fence posts, because we were building fencing here on the farm. He never did recover after the surgery.

COVID didn't help that at all. I'm forever grateful to all of the health care professionals who were there for us during that really incredibly difficult time. Again, to all of my colleagues on both sides of the House, I want to thank you for your support.

I also have some happy news to share today, as it is our daughter's birthday. It is what we call in our family a big O, but put a four in front of it. It's hard to believe when one of your babies turns 40. I want to wish her a really very, very happy day. Once we can, we will have a big celebration with all of our family and friends. Although being a mom of five, ages six to 20, and having her oldest daugh-

ter and her partner living with them, her busy house of eight always seems to have something going on. I think they have one of the biggest bubbles that I know of in the Kootenays.

Today she is going to be spoiled by all of them. I talked to her this morning. Her seven-year-old had created a video for her, with help from his auntie. It was pretty cute, and had seven-year-old issues in it, which were things I won't talk about on this part of my speech. But it was really.... It's great that she's getting spoiled in such a great way. It's much deserved.

Happy birthday, Sasha Rene.

I'm also really very humbled by the support of the people of Kootenay West, who re-elected me for the fifth time last October. I want to thank everyone who helped me to get re-elected and continue to support me in this job. I want to thank my two constituency assistants, Angelika Brunner and Cyra Yunkw, who do such an incredible job taking care of the needs of our constituents. I get amazing feedback from people that they are helping every day when I am out in the constituency doing my properly distanced shopping, and people consistently tell me what a great job they do.

I also want to thank all of my staff in the ministry office, who are also doing a really great job of supporting me as I take on this new ministry and this new role. When the Premier asked me to take on this new position, he told me that he thought I would be the very first woman to be Forests minister in B.C. So I did look it up, and it's actually only taken 110 years to have a woman in this position. I think it's better late than never.

I'm really so very, very proud of this diverse 42nd parliament that I am part of because we know that, as the throne speech said, we will be focused on putting people first. You know, we have been doing that since 2017, and we fully intend to not only continue that work, but to build upon the efforts we have made to date.

Before I outline some of the incredible investments made in my riding, I just want to take a moment to acknowledge the impact of the pandemic and the opioid crisis. I want to extend my condolences to everyone who has lost a loved one, and I want to recommit to the work our government has undertaken to address these concurrent crises.

This pandemic has uncovered some of our weaknesses, the cracks in the systems, the challenges we face. But we're working so hard, as hard as possible, to address the many issues created by what I believe has been inaction or poor policy or inadequate legislation under the previous government.

We acknowledge the many challenges ahead of us. But we know that British Columbians are being heard, appreciated, and supported by this government. In my riding of Kootenay West, we have been so fortunate to experience some of the incredible supports put in place by our gov-

ernment. We have never been through something like this in our lifetime.

[11:55 a.m.]

To experience the pandemic, while being part of the government, is both challenging and rewarding. Our caucus and cabinet have worked tirelessly to ensure that as many sensible, accessible and appropriate supports as possible are in place. There are many different types of supports, including mental wellness, financial, business and family supports. We've changed plans. We've changed legislation, and we've changed approaches as was needed to pivot in this ever-changing and ever-challenging pandemic.

What strikes me most is the resilience....

**Mr. Speaker:** Noting the hour, Minister.

**Hon. K. Conroy:** Noting the hour, I reserve my place to continue speaking and move adjournment of the debate.

Hon. K. Conroy moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. R. Kahlon moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:56 a.m.



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