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OFFICIAL REPORT OF  
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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
(HANSARD)

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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR  
Her Honour the Honourable Iona V. Campagnolo, CM, OBC

**SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT**

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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2006

The House met at 2:03 p.m.

### Tributes

#### CANADIAN OLYMPIC ATHLETES

**Hon. G. Campbell:** Let me start by saying that I'm sure everybody in this House sends our thanks and our congratulations to Canada's women's hockey team, who have come home with the gold. Now, I certainly don't want the opposition to read the wrong thing into this, but sometimes women do lead. We do hope that the example set will be followed by Canada's men's hockey team.

I'm sure the House would want to congratulate Denny Morrison of Fort St. John, who won silver, along with other members of his pursuit team. Of course, Sara Renner from the town of Golden — born in Golden — has also won a medal. Canada's athletes are doing extremely well, and I know everyone in this House would like to send them our congratulations.

#### Introductions by Members

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I'd also like to introduce in the House today Patricia and George Beatty from Markham, Ontario, parents of CTV's senior provincial political reporter Jim Beatty. I want both Patricia and George to know that Jim demands that we call him CTV's senior provincial political reporter. They are accompanied by their friends Jack and Linda Cohen, also from Markham, Ontario.

[1405]

I hope they'll let all of their friends from Ontario know that February is a great time to visit British Columbia. It's a lot friendlier; it's a lot warmer. It's a lot more hospitable than Ontario, so keep on coming back.

**C. Puchmayr:** I have in the gallery today a constituent of mine. His name is Chris Harwood, a new constituent of New Westminster. Please make him feel welcome.

**Hon. J. Les:** I have four guests in the gallery today. There is Kevin McIntyre, who is the president of the Insurance Brokers Association of British Columbia. He is also president of underwriters insurance group in Kamloops. In addition to him, there is Doug Guedes, who is the vice-president of the Insurance Brokers Association of B.C., and he is a partner in Seafirst Insurance Brokers Ltd. in Sidney. As well, we have Jim Barton, who is the president and CEO of Hub International Barton insurance brokers in the beautiful community of Chilliwack. Lastly, we have Chuck Byrne, who is the executive director of the Insurance Brokers Association of B.C. and who is located in Vancouver.

They will be inviting members to a reception later on today and are engaged in various meetings as well. I would ask the members of the House to please make these gentlemen welcome.

**D. Chudnovsky:** In the gallery today are two constituents of mine, Tali Roels and Maggie Rader. I first met Tali and Maggie during the election campaign last May when I knocked on their door. Tali, who is and was eight years old, questioned me rather seriously about a number of important issues. She did a terrific job. I think she will join this House one day. Would you please make Tali Roels and Maggie Rader welcome.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I have three guests in the gallery today. My wife Lesley is here. She is accompanied by, for me at least, not one but two sisters-in-law: Kathryn Temple, who is from Creston, and Kathleen Johnson, who's from White Rock. I'd like the House to make them all welcome.

**A. Dix:** It is my pleasure to introduce in the gallery today a former member of this assembly, a former Member of Parliament and the person who was the minister responsible for sport when British Columbia, Vancouver-Whistler, won the Canadian Olympic bid in 2000. I would like to introduce my friend Ian Waddell.

**D. Routley:** Could I have the members of the House help me welcome a constituent and friend, Rob Dawes from Duncan.

**B. Ralston:** I would ask the assembly to welcome Alan Ip, who's a Vancouver lawyer appearing here today in the Court of Appeal. But more importantly for this place perhaps, he is an alumnus of the B.C. Youth Parliament and its current registrar.

#### Statements (Standing Order 25B)

#### MUDSLIDE IN THE PHILIPPINES

**R. Lee:** The world reacted with heartache on Friday as a mountain on the Philippine island of Leyte collapsed and covered the tiny village of Guinsaugon in up to 30 metres of mud and debris. The 800-metre Mount Kanabag, weakened by two metres of heavy rain that fell in two weeks, was turned into a field of mud that covered 40 hectares of the village.

It's believed that only three out of the village's 300 homes were not buried by the mud. It is estimated that this catastrophe has cost over 1,000 lives, including 250 children and their teachers who were buried in their school. According to the most recent reports, only 100 bodies have been recovered.

This human tragedy has moved people all around the world. Pictures and reports describing survivors digging through the mud with their bare hands, trying to rescue their friends and families, are a poignant reminder of the fragility of our existence compared to the forces of nature.

[1410]

In Canada there are an estimated 350,000 people who trace their roots to the Philippines. Many of these

Filipino Canadians call British Columbia home, and their communities have been in mourning since the events unfolded.

As parliamentary secretary for the Asia-Pacific Initiative and on behalf of my colleagues, I would like to offer my condolences to British Columbia's Filipino community for their loss. Our hearts go out to them at this time of tragedy and grieving.

#### STANLEY DANIELS

**C. Wyse:** Today I rise in the House to recognize a grade 12 student from 100 Mile House. In addition to having been chosen as the role model for first nations youth in the Cariboo-Chilcotin, he was chosen as one of nine youths selected from across Canada to participate in the Gemini Project. This project is a leadership training program hosted by Royal Roads University. Stanley Daniels is a member of the Canim Lake first nations community. Daniels's performance at another leadership program in Victoria placed him at the top of a list which included 300 other youth whose names were submitted for consideration for this project.

The Gemini Project is a reciprocal mentorship idea where people from two very different sets of experiences come together to learn from, challenge and support each other. Stanley was paired with the Deputy Minister of Forests and Range. The deputy minister brought forward the issue facing him at that time: getting to know a new minister.

I wish to quote this grade 12 student of Peter Skene Ogden Secondary School as he described his experience to the *100 Mile House Free Press*. "All of these problems were real life. I worked with the Deputy Minister of Forests, coaching him on problems he was having with the minister. It was really intense because this was their real life, and here I was, a 17-year-old from 100 Mile, trying to help. I was holding onto a table to keep myself from running away, I was so scared."

I don't know whether he had any insights into what was about to unfold for all of us, but I also expect that the deputy minister may have chosen quite different words to describe the situation that they were both in.

Since then, Stanley has used his new-found skills to resolve a situation that developed in his home community, pulling youth and his chief and council together to....

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

**C. Wyse:** Please rise and recognize this individual for his achievements.

#### INVESTMENT IN MINERAL EXPLORATION

**R. Sultan:** A statement on the TSX Venture Exchange. When the Vancouver Stock Exchange disappeared into the east in 1999, pessimists believed entrepreneurial finance was permanently impaired in this town. Not so. Led by persons such as Brown, Giustra and Telfer plus Dickenson, Johnson and Catherine

McLeod, not to overlook Tognetti and many, many others, Vancouver regrouped, determined to rebuild on the basis of its proven excellence in risk capital. They succeeded spectacularly.

Today Vancouver is the mineral exploration financing capital of the world, easily surpassing New York, London and Toronto. Last year well over \$2 billion of mine exploration finance took place right here.

Is all of that mining money destined for B.C.? Well, actually, no. In the 1990s, facing a less than friendly government at home, our entrepreneurs and geologists simply switched their attention abroad through ventures ranging from Mongolia to Peru, from Africa to Spain. Today British Columbians create mines globally and, once again, in B.C. too.

They also extend their skills to other sectors. Today B.C. tech and B.C. biotech are backstopped by the self-same merchant bankers, lawyers and accountants as the mining industry. It turns out that using health sciences to discover gold in a test-tube is not so very different from using geoscience to find gold in a mountain range.

[1415]

What happened to the good old VSE? Well, it's alive and kicking under a new name — the TSX Venture Exchange. While domiciled in that other town east of the Rockies, almost half of its market cap is right here. Hats off to Howe Street — a good and respected name, creating prosperity for all British Columbians and the world.

#### HERITAGE DAY

**G. Gentner:** Today is Heritage Day, a day to celebrate and encourage the preservation and promotion of our significant historic, architectural, natural and scenic history. Heritage is our collective treasure given to us to bequeath to our children.

Contrary to what many may claim, B.C.'s heritage is very rich. In B.C. we have sites of great historical importance, but we cannot allow historically significant heritage sites such as Kilby Store or Barkerville to fall into disrepair. These are public cultural assets that need public attention.

In my community one very important archaeological site is threatened by development and neglect. In north Delta alongside the proposed South Fraser perimeter road, under the muck of the Fraser River, lies one of North America's oldest wet archaeological sites, Glenrose. When the ice age receded, the river along north Delta was the mouth of the Fraser. Eight thousand years ago there was no Richmond or Lulu Island or Ladner or a floodplain, but there was a fishing village. When the province built the Alex Fraser Bridge and changed river currents, the province mothballed the site by placing boulders where what now remains.

We may talk about new relationships and new freeways, but today let's think about preserving or at least excavating and documenting that valuable heritage we should so much enjoy. Today we should consider local governments that have incorporated suc-



cessful conservation planning strategies, like Nelson and Revelstoke. We need to recognize a renewed strategy of incentives for preservation in light of record real estate prices.

Heritage is our responsibility — everyone's: all communities' and the province's — to preserve our culture. Today we must act before it is all gone.

#### PREPARATIONS FOR 2010 OLYMPICS

**J. McIntyre:** With the 2006 Winter Olympics underway in Turin, it marks only four short years until British Columbia hosts the world. A week ago Sunday I joined crowds in Whistler to celebrate the start of the countdown. However, the Olympics are about more than sport and competition. The Olympics bring people across the globe together to celebrate not only our athletes but our arts, cultures and our communities' volunteers.

Right across the province, February 3 to 10, over 70 groups hosted more than 230 events as part of their Spirit of B.C. Week celebrations. These activities develop local programs and events that demonstrate the five elements that define the spirit of B.C. — achievement, effort, inclusion, celebration and excellence.

Other related government programs are also benefiting our communities. The \$20 million Olympic Live Sites program, Olympic viewing venues, recreation centres and sporting facilities in communities outside the Greater Vancouver and Squamish-Whistler corridor are now underway. Currently more than 70 live sites have been funded. Through the Arts Now program, 69 organizations in 23 B.C. communities are receiving funding to promote and celebrate their unique arts and culture.

In West Vancouver, I just had the privilege of attending the inaugural WinterSong Festival celebrating diversity in human voice.

Our hosting the games will also provide us an opportunity to showcase our unique first nations heritage and culture, and the Squamish Lillooet cultural centre in Whistler, for example, will provide a boost to our cultural-based tourism efforts.

Lasting legacies will be here for all British Columbians to experience. World-class sporting facilities will be created. Our Tourism Ministry will advance towards its goal of doubling revenues and creating 84,000 new jobs by 2015 through our enhanced reputation as a location for hosting vacations, conventions and sporting events, just like our very successful junior world hockey tournament.

The excitement is building to 2010 as we cheer on our 22 British Columbians and all Canadians in Turin. Go, Canada, go.

DAVID STUPICH

**L. Krog:** I speak today about a former member of this Legislative Assembly and former Member of Parliament. David Daniel Stupich was born in 1921 in Nanaimo to a Croatian miner father and Scottish Canadian spouse, thus uniting two of Nanaimo's most

important communities. He served in this assembly from 1963 to 1969 and from 1972 until 1988.

[1420]

He, like other politicians, had a great reputation clouded by scandal. Sir John A. Macdonald, the Pacific Railway scandal. Even a former Premier of this province, by court proceedings that followed his premiership, Bill Bennett. He was more than a scandal.

He was the Minister of Agriculture who early in his days in this Legislature, long before he became a member of a government, advocated for the agricultural land reserve. It is probably one of the most significant pieces of legislation passed in the 20th century in this province, and it has left a lasting and positive legacy for British Columbians.

So I ask this House today to pay tribute to a man who, like all of us, was mixed but in sum paid a great price in the public for whatever sins he may have committed in his life. I ask this House to honour a man who left behind, in my view, a better community and a better province than he was born into.

#### Oral Questions

##### REINSTATEMENT OF CHILDREN'S COMMISSION

**C. James:** This past Friday saw recommendations come forward from the coroner's jury in Port Alberni. The jury made 19 recommendations, one for each month of the little girl's life. The last recommendation, number 19, was a direct recommendation to the Premier: reinstate the Children's Commission.

My question is to the Premier. Will this government acknowledge that getting rid of the commission was a mistake, and will they admit in principle that having the independent commission is necessary to protect children at risk?

**Hon. G. Campbell:** First of all, I appreciate the work that was done by the coroner's jury in examining this tragic case. But I think even members of the coroner's jury would say to us that they would expect us to wait for the report of the independent child and youth officer, to wait for the report of Mr. Ted Hughes. We will consider all of those recommendations, and then we will act on behalf of the children of British Columbia to do what's best for the children of British Columbia.

This is important. We all believe in this House that children should be protected. We all believe in this House that we have to have the kind of responses to these challenges that are comprehensive. I believe the most reasonable and responsible action for us to take is to wait in respect for the work of Ms. Morley and Mr. Hughes, as well as of the coroner's jury, to make sure we do what is best for B.C.'s children.

**Mr. Speaker:** Leader of the Opposition has a supplemental.

**C. James:** I'm pleased we finally, finally, have those reviews going on after months and months of other

voices. The inquest jury was not the only voice. Those voices were added to social workers' voices, to foster parents' voices, to child advocates and to countless editorials. I will ask the Premier again: will he in principle acknowledge that getting rid of the Children's Commission was wrong and that putting in place an independent office will assist children at risk in this province?

**Hon. G. Campbell:** I join with the Leader of the Opposition and other members opposite in saying that this is a critically important issue. It's important enough that everyone understand what is currently in place in British Columbia. There is an independent officer. She is the independent child and youth officer in British Columbia. There are three reviews that are taking place, and we are going to pursue those reviews.

Let me simply say this. The Ministry of Children and Families has done some pretty exceptional work over the last four years in British Columbia. I think that the workers we have that have been providing us with advice and taking us forward in British Columbia have done very good work, just as others have done very good work. We owe them the respect. We owe all of those people who we've asked to undertake this review the respect that they deserve — that we wait for the reviews to come in. As a government, we will consider all of the recommendations, and then we will act in the best interests of the children of British Columbia.

**Mr. Speaker:** Leader of the Opposition has a further supplemental.

[1425]

**C. James:** I would like to remind the Premier that when he was on this side of the House, he stood up and supported the implementation of an independent Children's Commission. In fact, he stood up and urged this House to put the resources in place now to assist children at risk, not to wait so that more children would be at risk.

We have seen a minister that is totally out of control of his ministry, does not understand what's going on in this ministry. I would like to ask the Premier: will he get control of his minister and the ministry, or will he replace him and put someone in the job who can do the job on behalf of the children...?

**Hon. G. Campbell:** First, let me say unequivocally to this House: I have complete confidence in this ministry and, equally important, in this minister. This minister would not be in cabinet if I did not have confidence in this minister.

Let's start understanding this. Every member in this House is concerned about the tragedy that took place in 2002 in Port Alberni — every single member. Let's be clear on that, and let's be clear on what the government has tried to do for the children of British Columbia. We've done what every international expert would tell us is the best thing to do: keep children with their fami-

lies. That's exactly what this government has done. That's why there are 2,000 fewer children in care today than there were in 2001. That's 2,000 lives that we're providing support and opportunity to, who will have healthier, fuller lives as they go through the next number of years.

We have increased the support for social workers in British Columbia. There are more social workers being trained today. In fact, if you look back — and I think all of us should do that — you'll find that turnover in the ministry amongst social workers has been reduced by 30 percent over the last four years. Does that mean that we don't have problems? Of course there are problems. Does that mean we won't face tragedies? Unfortunately, on occasion there are tragedies that we have to face.

But this is what's important. Let's work together, let's look at the facts, let's invest in our kids, let's invest in the services, and let's make sure that British Columbia kids have the kind of future they all deserve by working together. That's what we're trying to do on this side of the House.

**A. Dix:** Well, my supplementary to the Premier, then. Since the Premier talks about international experts, can he name one international expert who would have said it would have been a good idea to cut the Ministry of Children and Family Development by 23 percent in January 2002? Can he name one international expert who would say it's a good idea when you're trying to keep families together to cut services to families? Can he name one international expert who would say that it's a good idea to lower child protection standards? Can he name one international expert who wouldn't agree with the jury in Port Alberni that we should reinstate an independent Children's Commission?

**Hon. S. Hagen:** Let me say, first of all, that we do respect the recommendations and will consider the recommendations from the jury, but in context with the other reviews that are going on by the Hon. Ted Hughes and by the child and youth officer.

However, let me say right at the start that we recognize how difficult the last two weeks have been for the people in Port Alberni. We recognize how difficult they've been for the family. We recognize how difficult it's been for the community and, most particularly, for the Nuu-chah-nulth Nation. I want to say that I've had discussions with the leadership of the Nuu-chah-nulth over the last while, several months, and we acknowledge how difficult it is. Having said that, the family has said to us: "Let's use this tragedy to learn from. Let's see what we can learn."

That's exactly what we're saying as government. We have Mr. Hughes out there examining the child protection issues in B.C. We expect to get some recommendations from Mr. Hughes. We have the child and youth officer as an independent person out there who has filed her report, which will become public in due course.

[1430]

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Vancouver-Kingsway has a supplemental.

**A. Dix:** I agree with the minister to this extent. The two weeks in Port Alberni were very challenging, and the courage shown by witnesses from the family and social workers to participate in that hearing and to tell the truth in a very difficult chapter should inspire all of us to want to do better.

One of the many upsetting moments in the testimony at the coroner's inquest was hearing social workers describe the impossible challenge of implementing the negligent and impossibly flawed guidelines sent out by the Ministry of Children and Family Development in 2002. This is what happens on the ground, I say to the Premier, when the cabinet doesn't take these issues seriously.

Can the minister explain why, three and a half years later, all child protection social workers across B.C. have not received formal training in section 8 kith-and-kin agreements?

**Hon. S. Hagen:** Let me talk about some of the improvements that have been made since 2002. We've already heard that there are 15 percent fewer children in care. That's good news. Those children are better off with their families. The number of adoptions in the province since 2001 has doubled. That's excellent news for those children.

Social workers now require kith-and-kin caregivers to undergo an additional record check through the B.C. Corrections CORNET database. This provides additional information necessary to ensure the safety of every child. Training and orientation precedes the implementation of new policies. A new audit process assures that every delegated agency presently has its own operational standards audited every three years. The core training and orientation period for delegated agency staff now meets that of ministry social workers.

#### ACTION ON RECOMMENDATIONS OF PORT ALBERNI INQUEST

**L. Krog:** At the conclusion of the inquest, the jury made several other key recommendations, including the duty of police and other public officials to report suspected child abuse under section 14 of the Child, Family and Community Service Act.

Additionally, they made specific recommendations with respect to the RCMP and the follow-up that they should have done in this case with the pathologist and social workers, especially in regard to the placement and leaving of a second child in an unsafe home. These recommendations echo the observations made in the director's case review of April 26, 2005.

My question is: as this case showed a clear and tragic failing to protect children as demanded under section 14 of the act, what plans does the Solicitor General have to follow up with the RCMP to implement

the recommendations made by the jury in the Port Alberni inquest?

**Hon. J. Les:** I appreciate the fact that members opposite are very interested in the recommendations that the coroner's jury made the other day. I was, frankly, somewhat taken aback a few weeks ago when the member for Vancouver-Kingsway was very dismissive of the coroner's inquest process and publicly drew into question whether the process had any utility whatsoever. I think we appreciate the recommendations that were made the other day. They are being studied closely by both the coroner's office and the RCMP, and the appropriate actions will be taken.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Nanaimo has a supplemental.

**L. Krog:** If I can draw the Solicitor General back to the observations made in the director's case review: "When a child dies, and there is no immediate evidence available to confirm the cause of death, a team of pre-identified health and social workers should be available to be consulted to determine the appropriate course of action, if any, to be taken with regard to any other child welfare concerning the home."

My question to the Solicitor General, again, is: does he support these observations, and will he act on them?

[1435]

**Hon. J. Les:** As I have already said, these recommendations that come from the coroner's inquest are extremely important recommendations. We intend to work with all agencies to which they apply, such as the RCMP and such as the coroner's office, to ensure that going forward, children in B.C. are absolutely protected to the best of our ability.

#### INVESTIGATION OF CASES OF MISSING WOMEN ON HIGHWAY 16

**J. Brar:** About three weeks ago I met with a number of representatives of various organizations in the Prince George area to discuss the women missing on Highway 16, which is also known as the highway of tears. The people told me very clearly about their disappointment with regard to the inaction by the Solicitor General's ministry. Last week we saw the body of another young woman who had gone missing on the highway. My question is to the Solicitor General. Can the Solicitor General explain his plan to increase the safety of these women living around Highway 16?

**Hon. J. Les:** Like all British Columbians, we certainly are shocked at the murders and apparent murders that are occurring along Highway 16. It is a priority of the authorities to get to the bottom of this and find out who the perpetrators are and to bring them to justice. At the moment some 22 members of the RCMP are dedicated to this investigation, as well as a considerable number of other members who are reviewing all

of the files that have occurred along that corridor over quite a number of years, to see whether there are any commonalities in any trends or anything at all that might be learned from any of those files. So it is very much a priority of our government. It is very much a priority of the RCMP to get the facts and to bring the perpetrators to justice.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge has a supplemental.

**J. Brar:** I understand exactly what the RCMP is doing. In fact, I also met the regional chief of the RCMP when I was in Prince George. What I don't understand is the priority of this government. I am not asking what the RCMP is doing. I'm asking: what is the vision of this government? That's my question.

Again to the Solicitor General. I would like to ask: what additional and proactive measures are being taken to ensure the safety of these women around Highway 16?

**Hon. J. Les:** I can report to the House that our government has actually been a national leader in terms of the integration of police resources. In fact, when we look at an investigation such as this one around Highway 16, for example, the Integrated Homicide Investigation Team will be very much involved in that. We have made it a priority of our government to ensure that all of the police resources that we have across British Columbia are as integrated as it is possible to be, in order to get the results that we need for the people.

As well, we have invested significant new resources in policing — to \$125 million, which was just announced by the Premier less than a year ago, which over time will result in the addition of 400 more police officers across British Columbia. I think our government has taken the lead in terms of keeping our communities safe in British Columbia.

#### FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S CENTRES

**D. Thorne:** My question is to the Minister of Community Services and Minister Responsible for Women's Issues. Advocacy and prevention were two of the key mandates of B.C. women's centres. Advocacy and prevention are part of the work that needs to be done to prevent further tragedies around the highway of tears. Will the minister commit today to restore funding to the women's centres across this province?

[1440]

**Hon. I. Chong:** Our commitment to protecting women fleeing abuse and children witnessing abuse has been a priority of this government. Last year we provided an additional 30-percent increase in the funding for those direct essential services for women.

Also, recently we announced an initiative that would allow us to focus on prevention of violence, and more initiatives that the local communities can access,

so that they can work towards providing some initiatives that deal with safety which target specific groups. We will continue to do that. Our commitment is about focusing services to protect women. We will continue to do that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member has a supplemental.

**D. Thorne:** Last year on March 31, all 37 women's centres in British Columbia had their funding cut by 100 percent — a paltry \$1.7 million in savings to an uncaring government. Recently our caucus met with women in Prince George. They complained of the lack of funding to deal with the issues around the highway of tears. One-off and sporadic project funding, to which the minister has just referred, does not provide the resources for any ongoing and sustained advocacy and prevention work.

Again, I ask: will this minister commit today to the restoration of core funding to women's centres so that they can get on with providing the leadership needed on issues of advocacy and further prevention of violence towards women?

**Hon. I. Chong:** As I've indicated, we increased the base funding for women's services, direct services to women, by a record \$12.5 million per year — the largest increase in a decade.

You know, the opposition can speak to increases for services all they wish. But when they had the opportunity to do so, when they supposedly balanced the budget, did they provide that increase? No, they did not. We did. We will continue to provide direct services focusing on women to prevent violence and to provide services for counselling. We've increased that. That is occurring around the province. I have visited a number of transition houses and a number of resource centres, and they continue to receive funding from this ministry to provide those services.

#### INCENTIVES FOR STAFF AT MINISTRY OF EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME ASSISTANCE

**C. Trevena:** I have a question for the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance. I would like to ask him to confirm that his ministry staff are receiving incentives — rewards of free dinners or free luncheons — if they deny people the benefits and crisis grants that they are legally entitled to.

**Hon. C. Richmond:** I don't think I quite heard all of the question. It was something to do with free lunches or incentive grants to staff. Maybe if the member could elucidate and just be a little bit more explicit. I must have missed something.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for North Island. This isn't a supplemental.

**C. Trevena:** This is not a supplemental. This is the same question.

I wanted to ask the minister whether he can confirm that staff in his ministry offices around the province are receiving rewards of free lunches and free dinners if they deny people their benefits and their crisis grants.

**Hon. C. Richmond:** I didn't think I'd heard the question right the first time. Now that I have heard it right, I think it's absolutely absurd. If it is happening, it's certainly without my knowledge. But I doubt it very, very much.

**Mr. Speaker:** Member for North Island has a supplemental.

**C. Trevena:** Again for the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance. Minister, we know that in Port Alberni, Nanaimo and Powell River alone, staff have been offered incentives if they come in under budget — effectively denying people their assistance.

I would like to ask the minister....

[1445]

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members.

**C. Trevena:** I would like to ask the minister whether he doesn't agree that moneys should be going into benefits and crisis grants, not into gimmicks and rewards.

**Hon. C. Richmond:** I honestly feel that the question is preposterous, but I would ask the member to name names. Give me the name of someone who is doing this, if you have such a name, and I will look into it.

#### COVERAGE OF BANK ACCOUNT CHARGES FOR INCOME ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS

**J. Horgan:** My question is also for the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance. It refers to last week's gimmick — the gimmick of free socks and travel mugs for income assistance recipients who would sign up for direct-deposit payments. My question is straightforward and simple, and if his seatmate wants to add some utility to this process, perhaps the minister can answer the question directly. Will he cover the costs of bank charges for those income assistance recipients who sign on for this new program?

**Hon. C. Richmond:** Once again, I think the members opposite have lost sight of what we're trying to do with this program. We are trying to keep their subsistence money out of the hands of those who prey on them every cheque dispensation day. If we can encourage these people to go to a direct-deposit system to keep these people who prey on them away from them by offering them five pairs of new socks, then I think it is well worth it.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca has a supplemental.

**J. Horgan:** Yes, again to the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance. I don't deny for a second that it would be a useful policy to get people away from direct cheque-cashing companies and other nefarious activities the minister touched on last week. But this is a simple question. It can be answered with a simple answer. Will your ministry cover the service charges? Banks are going to be making more money out of this, potentially, than the cheque-cashers. Will you commit to do that today?

Interjections.

**Mr. Speaker:** Members. Members.

**Hon. C. Richmond:** First of all to the member, the money marts who now cash their cheques charge considerably more than the banks do to cash the same things.

Secondly, we have arrangements with several financial institutions around the province, and specifically in the downtown east side, to assist these people, and their charges will be minimal.

Perhaps the member is suggesting that we should open a bank down there. I think maybe he should look into the history books to find out how successful the Four Corners bank was in the downtown east side.

#### COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

**B. Ralston:** My question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Lands. On Friday his ministry announced the formation of a committee to begin the study of an agricultural policy, which would be accompanied by a provincewide consultation. The news release calls this committee a committee of the Legislature; however, the minister has appointed only Liberal MLAs to this committee.

Now, I welcome the Liberal Party's interest in agricultural policy, but shouldn't the Liberal Party pay for this provincewide tour rather than the taxpayers of British Columbia?

**Hon. P. Bell:** I am sure the member will recall the conversation I had with him in the hallway, suggesting that we would embrace the vision of the opposition in terms of the development of a long-term agricultural plan for the province of British Columbia. We take this business very, very seriously, unlike the opposition. It was mentioned seven times in our Speech from the Throne.

[1450]

This committee is going to go out and do some very, very important work for the province. We think it is appropriate, in fact, that our caucus funding process will work to support this along with some ministry work.

But we look forward to the opposition bringing forward their recommendations, and certainly we will incorporate that as part of our plan.

**Mr. Speaker:** The member for Surrey-Whalley has a supplemental.

**B. Ralston:** The reports, in the previous administration, of these Liberal-only committees which toured the province — mining, invasive plants and land use planning — ended up as reports to the cabinet and were confidential and never released to the public. Will the minister commit today to release that report publicly rather than holding onto it? Who knows what's in it? Perhaps some secret recommendations on the agricultural land reserve.

**Hon. P. Bell:** I would encourage the member to look at the work as an example of some of the other activities. The Small-Scale Salvage Committee — there's an excellent piece of work that was put up on the website. Certainly, some of the work that was produced through the Results-Based Code Committee was key work that's very, very productive and has led this government forward.

As I said — and I'm not sure what's complicated about this — I've encouraged the members, as I did last week, to bring forward their recommendations in terms of what they proposed for agriculture in the province, and we'll be incorporating their thoughts in regards to this in the report.

[End of question period.]

### Tabling Documents

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. members, I have the honour to present the report of the Chief Electoral Officer regarding the 38th provincial general election, 2005, *Referendum on Electoral Reform*.

### Reports from Committees

**B. Lekstrom:** Today I have the honour to present the second report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for the first session of the 38th parliament entitled *Annual Review of the Budgets of the Independent Officers of the Legislative Assembly*.

I would move that the report be taken as read and received.

**M. Karagianis:** I stand as the Deputy Chair of that committee to say that the opposition is in support of this report, but I do have several issues that I would like to speak on today with regard to the report.

I think, first and foremost, that it's very important for us to ensure that statutory officers of government are properly resourced. In each of these cases, these are bodies that act on behalf of the public. Therefore when they come to us with requests for resources, those are serious, and government should do its utmost to make

sure that all of those statutory officers' duties are adequately funded and resourced.

There is a growing need and concern by the public for oversight of government activities. We will see that continue in the future, and in fact it will grow. The public has become more concerned, more interested, more attentive to government spending, and their demands for oversight of that will continue. It is a responsibility of both sides of this House to ensure that that oversight is provided.

Therefore, I would like to voice our concern about some funding requests that were not granted to a particular statutory department, and notice that in the future there will be a demand for those particular services within government. The Auditor General has in fact shown an inclination to provide the kind of oversight to the public that is requested by the public and that is the responsibility of government to give to the public.

It is my duty here to say that we have some concerns with the funding that was not granted to that office, and we'd like to be on record as saying that when the public comes and asks for that oversight and we are unable to present it, we have let them down.

Motion approved.

**B. Lekstrom:** I ask leave of the House to permit the moving of a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

[1455]

**B. Lekstrom:** I move that the report be adopted, and in moving the adoption of the report, I wish to make the following statements.

This has become an annual review by the Select Standing Committee of Finance and Government Services on the three-year rolling service plans and the budgets for each of the statutory officers. The committee deposited its report with the Office of the Clerk on December 20, 2005. Therefore, this is one of the earliest opportunities that the committee has had to present this report to the House.

I would like to thank the statutory officers for their presentations to the committee and work in this process. I would also like to thank all of the members who worked so hard on this committee to deal with this.

In responding, this is what I find a very important committee of this Legislative Assembly. We deal not only with the prebudget consultation paper, but as we see in this report, the statutory officers, which are independent officers of this Legislative Assembly who truly are the oversight for the public of British Columbia. As in all cases, we have budgets presented to us, our committee reviews them, goes through formal discussions with the independent officers and, through our deliberations as a committee, comes with our recommendations to this floor, being the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia.

It has been certainly a worthwhile project. I do want to point out that although the budgets have been

presented here today in our report, we look forward to the budget of British Columbia being presented tomorrow. It's important to note — and I want to just respond to the issue of the Auditor General's request — there was a significant lift in the Auditor General's budget this year to the tune of half a million dollars. That's a significant amount, so I don't want to leave any British Columbian with the thought that the budget for the Auditor General was decreased in any manner. It was increased.

The Auditor General, as well, can approach our committee at any time throughout the year — and it's our duty as the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services — should he have any concerns with his budget, requiring additional funds to investigate further issues for British Columbians as they bring them forward. That's a very important point.

At no point can the Auditor General be held to the budget. If he wants, he can come and present to our committee again. We then as a committee — as we've done in the due process that we have taken on so seriously for this Legislative Assembly and for all British Columbians — will evaluate, determine and, through discussion with the Auditor General or any other independent officer of this province, make our decision and report back to this Legislative Assembly.

**J. Kwan:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Finance Committee. I wish to also just respond to the report that has been tabled and, particularly, to respond to the Chair of the committee in his reporting out.

Let me just state very clearly — and let me also quote from the report — that the Auditor General actually came forward and asked the Finance Committee for two sets of funding increases. One was the \$800,000 increase. That would simply allow the Auditor General's office to do the examination to the "rigorous quality assurance standards being implemented with the accounting and auditing community," which would allow the Auditor General's office to continue "financial statement coverage over the broader government reporting entity which now includes school districts, universities, colleges and health organizations."

Let me just pause from quoting from the report for a moment here. With that change, it increased the work to the Auditor General significantly, and therefore that \$800,000 increase was essential for him to do the basic work that is required and expected of him from that office.

"The \$800,000 also provided for additional tools and supports, such as training and development, to ensure the office retains the skills and expertise needed to carry out the work plan."

Let me just pause for a moment here because as we all know that across Canada now, we have a situation whereby we have a major skills shortage, and that is no exception amongst the accounting world as well. The Auditor General is experiencing that, and he needed some of that \$800,000 to retain and to train the staff so that they could do the job that they are expected to do.

Last but not least, more timely audits in certain risk areas are essential for the government to be held to account. I think on behalf of all British Columbians... For that's what the Auditor General's office does.

The Auditor General is an officer of the Legislature. His job is to ensure that the government is held to account on the things they say they will do — more to the point, on the \$500,000 that the Auditor General's office asked for, which was denied by the committee that was comprised of the majority of the government members, just so that the Auditor General can do two risk audits in areas that are experiencing fundamental changes in the way in which the government operates.

[1500]

In the area of privatization we've seen fundamental changes in the direction this government wants to go in, but the government does not want the Auditor General's office to have the funding to look into those areas to see if they're delivering what they say they are.

The other piece that I would say is essential for the Auditor General's office to get funding for is, of course, this looming skills shortage, which impacts significantly on the capital projects and the cost overruns. Why wouldn't the government, which says that it's open and accountable and responsible, want the Auditor General's office to go in and make sure they're doing the work that they are doing to give British Columbians the kind of reassurance they want — that the government is, in fact, managing their resources well?

With that, I simply want to highlight these points. The Auditor General's office deserves that \$500,000, and I urge the Minister of Finance to consider that for tomorrow's budget.

**B. Lekstrom:** As the Chair, I would like to close the debate with a couple of words.

I think, as I indicated earlier, all of our independent officers are vitally important to how our province runs and how it has the independent oversight for British Columbians of how government operates in the projects it takes on.

The Auditor General is no exception to that. He presented his report. We as a committee discussed it, we debated it, we talked with the Auditor General, we reached our conclusion within our committee unanimously to present to this House, we brought it to this House, and today we're presenting the report.

I'm going to reiterate my thanks to the members of the committee for the work they put into this. There's a great deal of learning. There's a great deal that has to go into the work of the Finance Committee in order to come to the point we're at today in presenting this report.

The issue I want to close on, though, is to make sure that every British Columbian is clear. The Auditor General in British Columbia received a significant increase in this year's budget. He also has the ability to approach the Select Standing Committee on Finance should he require additional funds to do the work of the province of British Columbia on their behalf. The issue is that committee will then make recommendations to the floor of this Legislature.

Again, I'm proud to have been the chair of this committee. I'm proud of the work the committee members did on behalf all British Columbians, and I think it's a tremendous report.

Motion approved.

### Motions without Notice

**Hon. M. de Jong:** For the information of members, I have a series of motions that relate to the committee structure. Just in terms of the procedural niceties of this, what I propose to do today, and I think my friend the Opposition House Leader is aware, is charge the committees and, in most instances, recharge the committees. A committee of selection will then meet later this week, assuming we can arrange that at a mutually convenient time, and deal with the task of assigning individuals to the committees.

Today these motions are designed to charge or recharge the committees, most of which, if not all of which, were functioning when we last met during the fall session.

#### POWERS AND ROLE OF FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE

**Hon. M. de Jong:** By leave I move firstly that:  
[The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services be empowered:

1. To examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to the pre-budget consultation report prepared by the Minister of Finance in accordance with section 2 of the *Budget Transparency and Accountability Act* and, in particular, to:
  - (a) Conduct public consultations across British Columbia on proposals and recommendations regarding the provincial budget and fiscal policy for the coming fiscal year by any means the committee considers appropriate, including but not limited to public meetings, telephone and electronic means;
  - (b) Prepare a report no later than November 15, 2006 on the results of those consultations; and
2. (a) To consider and make recommendations on the annual reports, rolling three-year service plans and budgets of the following statutory officers:
  - Auditor General;
  - Chief Electoral Officer;
  - Conflict of Interest Commissioner;
  - Information and Privacy Commissioner;
  - Ombudsman;
  - Police Complaint Commissioners; and,
- (b) To examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to other matters brought to the Committee's attention by any of the Officers listed in 2(a) above.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, the committee shall be empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number one or more subcommittees and refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the committee;
- (b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- (d) to retain personnel as required to assist the committee,

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

With further leave, it is the same motion that was passed previously, and I will move that that committee be charged with its task, as has become the regular format here.

Leave granted.

Motion approved.

[1505]

#### POWERS AND ROLE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Similarly, by leave I move that:

[1. The reports of the Auditor General of British Columbia deposited with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly during the Second session of the Thirty-Eighth parliament be deemed referred to the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts, with the exception of the report referred to in section 22 of the Auditor General Act, which is referred to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. And, in addition, that the following reports of the Auditor General of British Columbia be referred to the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts:

- a. Government of BC and Office of the Auditor General Report *An Assurance Program for BC: A Progress Report on the February 2002 Recommendations of the Public Accounts Committee of BC Related to Building Better Reports* (September 2004).
- b. Auditor General Report No. 6, 2004/2005 *Leading the way: Adopting Best Practices in Government Financial Reporting — 2003/2004* (November 2004).
- c. Auditor General Report No. 8, 2004/2005 *Follow-up of 2002/2003 Report 5: Managing Contaminated Sites on Provincial Lands* (November 2004).
- d. Auditor General Report No. 9, 2004/2005 *Follow-up of Two Health Risk Reports* (December 2004).
- e. Auditor General Report No. 12, 2004/2005 *Third Follow-up Report of Management Consulting Engagements in Government* (March 2005).
- f. Auditor General Report No. 13, 2004/2005 *Building Momentum for Results-based Management: A Study about Managing for Results in British Columbia* (March 2005).
- g. Auditor General Report No. 1, 2005/2006, *Follow-up of the Recommendations of the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts contained in its Fourth*



*Report of the 3rd Session of the 36th Parliament: Earthquake Preparedness; Performance Audit (May 2005).*

- h. Auditor General Report No. 2, 2005/06, *Joint Follow-up of 2001/2002: Report 1 Managing Interface Fire Risks and Firestorm 2003 Provincial Review (May 2005).*
- i. Auditor General Report No. 3, 2005/2006, *Audit of the Government's Corporate Accounting System: Part 1 (June 2005).*

- 2. That the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts be the committee referred to in sections 2, 6, 7, 10, 13 and 14 of the Auditor General Act.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts, the Committee be empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
- (b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- (d) to retain personnel as required to assist the Committee,

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

This, again, is the motion by which these reports are referred to that committee. The motion then, as is standard, provides the Select Standing Committee on Public Accounts with the usual powers to conduct those examinations, and I with leave so move.

Leave granted.

Motion approved.

#### POWERS AND ROLE OF CROWN CORPORATIONS COMMITTEE

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Next, again, a standard motion for the session with respect to the Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations — that it be appointed to review the annual reports and service plans of B.C. Crown Corporations and that its members be provided with the usual powers to do so. I move that:

[the Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations be appointed to review the annual reports and service plans of British Columbia Crown Corporations.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committee on Crown Corporations, the Committee be empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;

- (b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- (d) to retain personnel as required to assist the Committee,

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

Motion approved.

#### POWERS AND ROLE OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**Hon. M. de Jong:** The next committee, the Select Standing Committee on Education, was originally charged in the fall of 2005 to be empowered to examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to finding effective strategies to address the specific challenge of adult literacy and, in particular, to conduct consultations to consider successful strategies from other jurisdictions on the promotion of adult literacy and, secondly, specific strategies to improve literacy rates among aboriginal people, English-as-a-second-language adults and seniors. Again, that committee and its members are provided with the usual powers, and it is charged with the task of reporting to the House not later than November 30, 2006. I move that:

[The Select Standing Committee on Education be empowered to examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to finding effective strategies to address the specific challenge of adult literacy and, in particular, to conduct consultations to consider:

1. Successful strategies from other jurisdictions on the promotion of adult literacy.
2. Specific strategies to improve literacy rates among aboriginal people, English-as-a-Second-Language adults, and seniors.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committee on Education, the Committee shall be empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
- (b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- (d) to retain such personnel as required to assist the Committee,

and shall report to the House no later than November 30, 2006, to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

Motion approved.

#### POWERS AND ROLE OF HEALTH COMMITTEE

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Next, by leave, the Select Standing Committee on Health, again, originally charged in the fall of '05 to conduct an examination and inquiry and make recommendations with respect to finding effective strategies to change behaviour and encourage children and youth to adopt lifelong health habits that will improve their health and curb the growing rate of obesity.

The committee is charged with four specific terms of reference which are duplicated in this motion from that which it was charged in the fall of '05. Again, the committee and its members are provided with the standard range of authorities and powers and asked to report to the House no later than November 30, 2006.

[The Select Standing Committee on Health be empowered to examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to finding effective strategies to change behaviour and encourage children and youth to adopt lifelong health habits that will improve their health and curb the growing rate of obesity to achieve the great goal of leading the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness.

The Committee is also empowered to conduct consultations and to:

1. Report on recommendations from the Select Standing Committee on Health Report from 2004 titled *The Path to Health and Wellness: Making British Columbians Healthier by 2010*.
2. Conduct research into other successful childhood health and wellness promotion campaigns in other jurisdictions to analyze their potential effectiveness in BC.
3. Undertake discussions on how to promote childhood health and wellness including the appropriate use of incentives and disincentives to help influence behaviour, particularly as it relates to healthy nutrition and physical activity.
4. Undertake discussions with experts and if necessary undertake research into the factors contributing to unhealthy eating and physical inactivity in youth of today.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committee on Health, the Committee shall be empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
- (b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- (d) to retain such personnel as required to assist the Committee,

and shall report to the House no later than November 30, 2006, to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House,

the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

Motion approved.

#### POWERS AND ROLE OF AQUACULTURE COMMITTEE

**Hon. M. de Jong:** In the fall a Special Committee on Sustainable Aquaculture was charged. This motion, with leave, simply duplicates that assignment from the fall session. Members will know that this committee was asked to report to the House as soon as possible but not later than May 31, 2007.

I move that:

[A Special Committee on Sustainable Aquaculture be appointed to examine, inquire into and make recommendations with respect to Sustainable Aquaculture in British Columbia and in particular, without limiting the generality of the foregoing to consider:

1. The economic and environmental impacts of the aquaculture industry in B.C.
2. The economic impact of aquaculture on B.C.'s coastal and isolated communities.
3. Sustainable options for aquaculture in B.C. that balance economic goals with environmental imperatives, focusing on the interaction between aquaculture, wild fish and the marine environment.
4. B.C.'s regulatory regime as it compares to other jurisdictions.
5. Solicit and consider written and oral submissions from any interested person or organization by any means the Committee considers appropriate;

The Special Committee so appointed shall have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and is also empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
- (b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient;
- (d) to retain such personnel as required to assist the Committee;

and shall report to the House as soon as possible but no later than May 31, 2007 or following any adjournment, or at the next following Session, as the case may be; to deposit the original of its reports with the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly during a period of adjournment and upon resumption of the sittings of the House, the Chair shall present all reports to the Legislative Assembly.]

Motion approved.

[1510]

#### POWERS OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO APPOINT A MERIT COMMISSIONER

**Hon. M. de Jong:** By leave again, this relates to a special committee that was appointed in the fall of '05, a committee of selection to unanimously recommend to

the assembly the appointment of an individual to hold office as the Merit Commissioner — again, the standard set of powers for the committee of selection and to report to the House as soon as possible.

I so move:

[A Special Committee be appointed to select and unanimously recommend to the Legislative Assembly, pursuant to section 5.01 of the *Public Service Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 385, the appointment of an individual to hold office as the Merit Commissioner for the Province of British Columbia, and that the Special Committee so appointed shall have the powers of a Select Standing Committee, and is also empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
- (b) to sit during any period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- (d) to retain such personnel as required to assist the Committee;

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

Motion approved.

#### POWERS OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO APPOINT AN OMBUDSMAN

**Hon. M. de Jong:** Finally. Again, last fall a special committee of selection was appointed to unanimously recommend the appointment of an Ombudsman to this assembly — the usual set of powers with the request that the committee report to the House as soon as possible.

I so move.

[A Special Committee be appointed to select and unanimously recommend the appointment of an Ombudsman, pursuant to Section 2 (2) of the *Ombudsman Act* (RSBC 1996 c. 340), and that the said Committee shall have the powers of a Select Standing Committee and in addition is empowered:

- (a) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
- (b) to sit during a period in which the House is adjourned, during the recess after prorogation until the next following Session and during any sitting of the House;
- (c) to adjourn from place to place as many be convenient; and
- (d) to retain such personnel as required to assist the Committee;

and shall report to the House as soon as possible, or following any adjournment, or at the next following

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

Motion approved.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** For the information of members, all of the motions will be on deposit, and my friend the Opposition House Leader has them as well. If there are any questions....

Interjections.

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I know some members are transfixed by my oratory when I deliver these and regret the passing of the moment, but I do not.

The motions will be available, and the committee of selection will, I hope, meet later in the week to confirm the names of members who are assigned to do these tasks. I think that's all.

#### Orders of the Day

**Hon. M. de Jong:** I call continued debate on the throne speech.

#### Throne Speech Debate (continued)

**L. Mayencourt:** It's a great pleasure to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne. This short document lays out a blueprint for where British Columbia is headed over the next year, and I want to say that I'm very, very proud to stand in this Legislature and speak in favour of it.

Before I begin, I would like to also thank my constituents. As the member for Vancouver-Burrard, I have the pleasure of representing about 90,000 people in the downtown peninsula. It's a great neighbourhood, and it's made up of several different communities. It is that mixture of communities that makes it so diverse and such a wonderful place to be.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

Whether you're standing on the shores of Coal Harbour and looking at the lands that have been developed by the Bayshore community, where we now have the brand-new performing arts lodge being built or seaside affordable housing for our neighbourhood, it's just a great place to be. Of course, we've got a wonderful community centre there.

Coal Harbour is growing quite rapidly, and that means we will soon be needing to deal with some of the issues that come with a growing neighbourhood. One of those is that we've got a little bit of a baby boom happening down there, so we're going to be needing a school pretty soon. We already have a number of young children in that neighbourhood,

but I expect that this trend will continue and that soon we will have need of a Coal Harbour elementary school somewhere.

Yaletown, by contrast, has already got its brand-new school. Elsie Roy is a school that I'm very, very proud of. It is named after a very wonderful teacher from the Vancouver school system. Elsie Roy has a wonderful principal. Isabel Grant is the principal there, a wonderful person that has made quite a difference in the neighbourhood. Elsie Roy Elementary School is home to about 400 new students right now. Many of them come through the early childhood development programs at the neighbouring Dorothy Lam Centre.

Yaletown has become really a model community. It's become a place where people know they are appreciated, where different views are understood, and it's got kind of an energy to it.

[1515]

One of the more traditional neighbourhoods in my neighbourhood is, of course, the West End. It is home to about 40,000 people — about half of the constituency — and a great community as well. We have a couple of schools there. I think it's important I note that one of our principals, Patti Lefkos, who has been instrumental in creating the Vancouver inner-city educators committee, retired this December. It is a great loss to all of us in the neighbourhood because Patty was a really great individual. She really understood inner-city education. She was someone with a great passion for it, and she brought about a lot of change, not just in my neighbourhood but in neighbourhoods to the east and neighbourhoods to the south.

All of the schools that I've been working with in my neighbourhood — Elsie Roy, King George high school, Lord Roberts and Roberts Annex — have been working very, very hard together to make sure that kids in the downtown core are getting the very best opportunities as far as education goes. I've been very involved in trying to make sure that we do a good job as a province in dealing with some of the unique challenges that exist in the Vancouver school board.

Recently I had the opportunity to host a forum which included members of both sides of this House and members of the Vancouver school board — school trustees — and some staff and some parent advisory committee members. We had a wonderful opportunity to sit down and talk about some of the challenges that are facing us in Vancouver. One of those, of course, is English as a second language.

Now, I had the opportunity to work with a number of people who are concerned with this. There is actually some concern within the ESL community about whether they're able to deliver services as adequately as they want to. One of the things that happens in our ESL program is that it's about teaching kids English, but there's much more to ESL than that.

You see, many of these kids come from China or the Philippines or Germany or Bosnia or what have you, and they come to Vancouver. Of course, yes, they need to learn English, but their families come here with them, and their families need to find a way to settle

into our community, to become part of the community and to understand what our school system is like, how our government works and how parents are expected to be involved in our school system in British Columbia. That's not something that's generally accepted in other countries, but in British Columbia we want parents involved, and so settlement services have become a very important issue in my neighbourhood.

I had the opportunity just recently to meet with individuals from an ESL consortium as well. The ESL consortium is composed of six school districts. North Vancouver, Vancouver, Richmond, Burnaby, Coquitlam and Surrey take almost 95 percent of the immigrant populations into the province, and so it means that there are lots of things that need to be done. There's a great organization, this consortium of ESL providers, working to make sure that we provide the right level of services there.

I'm also very pleased. We recently had the class-size survey, which was completed in this district of Vancouver. I was very glad to see that British Columbia was doing very, very well on class size but, most particularly, that the school district I'm in, Vancouver school board, was being very accountable to parents and that it had below averages for class sizes. I think that was really, really important.

I took the opportunity this last little while to work on a special project in Vancouver-Burrard. I've mentioned it once or twice before, and that is the Dalai Lama centre for peace and education.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

As many recall during the Dalai Lama's visit in 2004, I had the privilege of being able to work with the organizing committee to make his visit reach as many British Columbians as was possible, and I was very grateful for the opportunity to do that. It was a great experience to meet His Holiness, it was a great experience to work with a terrific bunch of volunteers, and it was a great experience to see 40,000 British Columbians get to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama over the course of a five-day visit.

Members of that volunteer committee have decided that they want to go a step further with the Dalai Lama, and we have started work with the province, with the city of Vancouver and with a lot of different community organizations, particularly colleges and universities in British Columbia, to create the Dalai Lama centre for peace and education in Vancouver.

[1520]

This is an initiative that I am very, very proud of, and I've been working with a large number of people to make sure that it happens. We've also been touched by the generosity of British Columbians that see this as a valuable initiative to have in our community.

The Dalai Lama's mission of recognizing basic human values has also been something that resonates in Vancouver, and it resonates in Vancouver because we've always been a community that really appreci-

ated the issues of peace. We, of course, have been the location where a lot of peace rallies have occurred, so this is very nice to see this sort of work continuing on. I'm very optimistic that when the Dalai Lama returns to Vancouver in September of 2006 that not only will he be visiting here and engaging in wonderful dialogues with people in our community, but also perhaps we'll have the opportunity to take out a shovel and make a ground-breaking ceremony for the Dalai Lama centre.

While the Dalai Lama is here, we're going to be doing some very interesting things, and I'm proud that by working on that committee I'm able to help out in that. We're going to have a dialogue that will bring together 500 of the leading businesses in North America, bring them into a conversation with the Dalai Lama and other Nobel prize laureates so that we can talk about the role that business has in creating safe, caring communities. That's something that is very important to me, and it's very important to His Holiness the Dalai Lama as well.

The other part of this that's going to be very, very interesting is we're going to host a forum on mental health and addictions. This is something that.... Of course, in Vancouver there's no escaping the fact that we have issues around mental health and addictions and that we have to try harder. We continue to try very hard to ensure that we provide the services that people need so that they can deal with those addictions and so that they can get the services they need through the mental health system.

As members will know, I've had a great affection for the downtown east side and some of the challenges that are being faced there. Of course, as we look at the issues of mental health and we look at the issues of addictions and stuff, I thought it was really important to see if we could do something a little bit differently. I had the opportunity over the Christmas break to visit a couple of intentional communities. By "intentional communities" I mean these are communities that exist for one specific purpose, one of them being an eco-village up in northern Scotland and another that I want to focus on for a few minutes — that is San Pietro, which is in central Italy.

San Pietro is a village of 2,200 recovering drug addicts. These drug addicts live in this village and work in this village. They stay there for three to five years. They work on their recovery, but in addition to that they become part of an active community, a governance community. They become engaged in how their community is going to look. They are all taught trades or are offered the opportunity to get grade 12 or to go through university or take an apprenticeship program. San Pietro is a marvellous example of what people can do when they get out of the box, when they understand that there are ways of healing from addictions, healing from mental health issues, and part of that is just becoming part of a community.

One of the things that I noticed when I spent a few days on the streets of Vancouver was that many of the homeless people, many of the people with addictions, are completely disconnected from our community, and

that's really something that stunts people's growth. It stops them from having the opportunity to participate. It stops them from being able to feel like they are valued in the community, and through low self-esteem and other things, they end up in a cycle of addiction and dependence and what have you. So I'm very interested in seeing us look at this kind of a model in British Columbia.

The past year meant that we had a civic election, as well, and I want to offer my congratulations to our new mayor, Sam Sullivan. Sam is obviously in Torino today because he's going to be accepting the Olympic flag for Vancouver and for British Columbia. I know that Sam is a great guy who has done a lot for the city of Vancouver. I want to pay tribute and also thank very much Mayor Larry Campbell, now Senator Larry Campbell, for his contributions to our city and also to individuals, such as Jim Green, who have done a lot of work in the downtown east side. I'm sorry that they won't be sitting on city council, but I know that their legacy will live on, and I'm sure that we will have opportunity to hear from both of them in the future as well.

[1525]

I had the pleasure of looking over the Speech from the Throne, and I want to talk for a minute about some of the initiatives that are there. One of them that has really touched my heart has been our relationship with first nations. Just a couple of weeks ago we had a press conference, and the Premier announced the land use strategy for the north coast and for the mid-coast.

We had that event at the Pan Pacific downtown in Vancouver, and hundreds of people came to it. One of the great things was that there were a lot of first nations bands represented from all up and down the coast. I heard these individuals, leaders within their communities, talk about the importance of the cooperative relationship that has developed between our government and first nations.

I sat beside the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation and said to him as we were sitting there: "What a long way we have come." There's a new kind of attitude in British Columbia around first nations, and it's reflected in just as simple as the word "reconciliation." I'm really proud of what our Premier and my colleagues on this side of the House have done in regards to first nations.

It's a great triumph. It is the right way that we are heading — to make sure that all people in British Columbia are part of our community, that all of us have an opportunity to be at the table. That's something I'm very, very proud of.

I'm also proud of some of our Asia-Pacific initiatives. I think it's very important that we now understand we are reaching out to communities well beyond the borders of Canada to give us prosperity, to have us learn from their cultures, learn from their business practices, to be able to invest and trade with them, to share our culture. I think it's very important, and I'm very pleased with the initiatives that have been launched by this government on the Asia-Pacific.

The Premier is often quoted as saying: "There's only one Asia-Pacific province in Canada, and that is British Columbia." We are the link between central Canada and China, Hong Kong and many other nations over on that side. I am particularly pleased because we have finally had an opportunity to work with our federal counterparts and work with civic leaders to create something called the Gateway project.

The Gateway project will be debated in this House many times, I am certain. We started off talking today about it, and I want to just say how inspiring it is to see that our government has moved from 2001, where we didn't really have much to work with, to a time when we can make a commitment of \$3 billion to ensure that British Columbia actually benefits from the Asia-Pacific connection we have. We are able to get in there and trade with Asia-Pacific, not merely so that Vancouver can prosper but so that our entire province can prosper — so people in Prince Rupert, in Cranbrook, in Dawson Creek and all around the province can benefit.

Even more so, all of Canada benefits by our strong links to the Asia-Pacific. People in Sudbury will benefit from it. People in Nova Scotia will benefit from it. People all across Canada will benefit, because we have a link to billions and billions of people over on the other side in Asia-Pacific that want to do business with Canada, that need fast access to ports and markets not just in Canada but in North America. I'm very, very proud of the work that our Minister of Transportation and our Premier have done in regards to this.

I know that tomorrow is a big day for us. Tomorrow is the day that we'll be talking about our budget, and I want to say I have a lot of respect for the people that have worked together to make British Columbia prosperous. We've come a long way from 2001, as I said, when quite frankly, we were in the hole. We've had an opportunity to build up our strength, to grow, to become a have province instead of a have-not province, and it's a great privilege for me to wait for the budget tomorrow.

[1530]

I have great hopes for all of the opportunity that lies ahead for British Columbia, and I know our Finance Minister has worked steadily with people from every sector of our economy to ensure that what we are doing keeps us on the right track. We need a continued thriving economy in order to grow and be able to meet the challenges that are before us. We need to keep a strong economy so that we can afford to look after kids, so that we can afford to look after the homeless, so that we can look after those most vulnerable in our society.

We had a debate earlier this morning around homelessness. I want to tell you about a program that has been initiated in my neighbourhood, which has been very, very successful and that I hope will spread to other neighbourhoods.

As members will know, there are particular challenges in reaching some of the folks that are homeless in our communities. The Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance launched an initiative three months ago, and it's been a pilot in my neighbourhood. What

happens is each night members of that ministry have gone into the streets in Vancouver-Burrard. They have talked to homeless people. They have said, "Listen, let's go have a cup of coffee or breakfast or a smoke" — whatever it takes to get them engaged in a conversation.

Once they've had a chance to establish a rapport, a chance to work with those individuals to gain some trust, they have taken them before the offices have opened over to the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance. They've got them signed up and done an emergency intake on them so that they can get access to welfare, so that on that very same day they can find a place to live.

Now, this is a great project. It's called the homeless outreach program, and I think we just need an "e" on the end because what it stands for is hope. It's hope for people, and it's been very, very successful. As I said, it's modest, but in my neighbourhood we've taken 60 individuals off the street. Sixty individuals have been lifted up from their doorway in some abandoned building or a squat in some park or somewhere. They've been brought into a system that says: "Look, we can try and help you. We can be of help to you."

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

Of those 60 individuals, 53 of them today are still in housing. That's amazing. There are 53 of them still there. That's a big challenge. That's something that these people have not been able to accomplish in years.

I talked today with the executive director of the MEI program in Vancouver, and he tells me that we've still got some problems. Eight of those individuals are still at risk. They are not quite fitting in or settling into the housing that we found for them, and there's some fear that they might yet again end up on the street.

What it does tell me is that out of 60 people in three months, we have now 45 fewer homeless people on the streets of my community, and that is a triumph. That is a sign of a government that is willing to get out of the box and try and do something about homelessness in our communities.

I am also very excited to be part of a government that's been so tremendously influential in getting the Olympics here for 2010. I want to tell you, as was mentioned earlier today, I congratulate all the medal winners in the Olympics that represent Canada and in particular our women's hockey team. I think they did a terrific job. They could be very, very proud of the medals that hang around their necks, and we can be proud to be Canadians because of the efforts that they have made.

We have a number of representatives from Vancouver in the Olympics. We have Manuel Osborne-Paradis in the alpine skiing, the downhill combined and Super-G. We have Mira Leung who's in the singles in figure skating. We have Aaron Lowe from mixed-dance figure skating and Megan Wing. We have Jeffrey Christie in the men's singles, and many, many more British Columbians are part of this.

We have a lot of companies that have joined in with us, as well, to be part of this. I'm very excited to be working with partners like Bell, Lululemon, Ainsworth Lumber, Culinary Capers, Electronic Arts, Instyle Ceramics — people that have made a commitment to our Olympic movement here in British Columbia.

I'm very proud of the work that we're doing on the Olympics. I'm proud of the work we're doing in reaching out to those that are most vulnerable. I'm proud of the initiatives we've launched in terms of making sure that ESL programs are available for recent immigrants.

[1535]

I want to talk about another program that I had the opportunity to be involved with, with many members, actually — the member for Richmond-Steveston, the member for Burquitlam, the member for North Vancouver-Seymour and many, many others. That was dealing with some of the issues around international medical graduates. People that were watching us last session will know that this has been an important thing for us. We had only six training spaces for those people, and we wanted to make sure we could expand that. We were able to do that this year. We now have an additional 18 spaces. That means that a lot more people are going to be able to be trained in British Columbia, brought up to speed with our credentials here. That means people around this province will have greater access to primary care physicians as well as to specialists. I think it's important that people understand that we are not just bringing in general practitioners. We had the opportunity to make sure that we brought in specialists as well.

There are a couple of things on my agenda as we head towards the rest of this session. As you know, I have a couple of bills on the order paper that I hope to advance. The first one is the apology act. I introduced this bill initially last fall, and it was a very, very important step. I think that when you look at things like reconciliation, those things don't happen until someone says sorry.

When we have in some way harmed someone, it is a very natural, compassionate and moral thing to do to say: "I'm sorry." We've had opportunities here in this very Legislature to talk to people that were interned during World War II — the Japanese that were interned in British Columbia — and the Doukhobors who had their children taken away from them during the '50s and early '60s. We have certainly a lot of ground to cover when it comes to first nations.

The apology act is a piece of legislation that enables us to actually do those sorts of things, but it goes even further than that. It goes on to help people with a variety of other issues, and I think it's a piece of legislation whose time has come. Interestingly, the very first day of the session this past week the Ombudsman tabled a report recommending that British Columbia adopt an apology act. This is something that's been used in California, and of course, members will know that it's been used extensively in Australia. It means that people have the opportunity to apologize without increasing their liability, without offending someone. I think it is very important for us to be able to do that.

The second act that I hope to introduce in this session is to deal with bullying, harassment and intimidation in our school system. I believe that it is time for British Columbia to act decisively and firmly about issues of bullying, harassment and intimidation in our school system. I had the opportunity to travel this province. I've met with thousands and thousands of kids in British Columbia, hundreds and hundreds of teachers. We all know we have to do something better to protect children from the very silly but dangerous things that happen to us in our school system.

I hope that members on both sides of the House will understand that this is an important piece of legislation and that they'll support it and that if they can find ways of enhancing it, they'll be able to offer that to us. It's a great opportunity that I've experienced to introduce a couple of private members' bills before. I think it's really wonderful that members, whether we're on the opposition side or on this side, have that opportunity, and I would hope that we will have a great opportunity to debate both of those bills in the near future.

I want to once again thank all of the people that were involved in getting me re-elected. As you'll know, this was kind of a squeaker for me.

Interjection.

**L. Mayencourt:** Yeah, I like the landslide tag.

I've got to tell you, winning by 11 votes is a very humbling experience. You get to have a real sense of how important each person is. I really feel that. I've got to tell you I love this job that I have here. I think some days I'm pretty good at it, some days I'm real good at it and some days I'm not. But on balance....

Interjection.

[1540]

**L. Mayencourt:** Yeah, thank you. I appreciate the love.

I think that this is a great job, and it's a great privilege. For those 11 people, I want to thank you. For the other 12,000, I want to thank you too. I want to thank all the people that live in Vancouver-Burrard. We have an opportunity quite often to get together and talk about things. Boy, I've got some really nice people in my neighbourhood — people that I'm really, really proud of, people that are community-minded and caring, people that are trying to make a difference, people that are trying to make our neighbourhood safer and better for the kids and the seniors and what have you. It's a great privilege to do that.

Some members will know that recently we had a little discussion in my neighbourhood around St. Paul's Hospital. I've got a fair bit of passion when it comes to St. Paul's. St. Paul's is a very important institution in my neighbourhood. As I said, we've got about 90,000 people that live in my neighbourhood. We've got another 150,000 people that come down to the downtown peninsula every day to work. I think that St. Paul's is a

very important asset in my neighbourhood. It's an asset that I'm prepared to fight for, and it is something I believe my neighbourhood is willing to fight for. We had over 500 people show up on a very sunny Saturday afternoon to say: "We want to protect our hospital. We want to make sure that we're consulted about its development, and we want to make sure that it's improved and brought up to date."

It is time. British Columbians had a plan to redevelop St. Paul's that got a little halted in 1996, and I'd like to see that plan redeveloped. I'm fully committed to working with all partners in my community — everybody — to make sure we get to keep St. Paul's, to make sure it develops the way it should so we can continue to provide the very best of care that St. Paul's is already known for, for the people in my neighbourhood.

As I said before, it is great to be back in this House. I love being here. I love working with my constituents. I love working with all of the people, both sides of this House, to make sure that we look after the people in British Columbia and do the best that we can.

With that, I'd like to turn the floor over to a member on the other side who is eagerly awaiting the opportunity to speak. I know that they have a great deal to say, and it'll be important. I look forward to listening to it.

**Deputy Speaker:** The Chair wishes to remind members that should they wish to make a comment, they should do so from their own seats.

I recognize now the member for Columbia River-Revelstoke.

**N. Macdonald:** Thank you very much for the opportunity to respond to the throne speech. There are a few things that I want to touch on from the throne speech, in particular some conversation from a local perspective around health care and what is alluded to within the throne speech. There is talk about transformative change, about a fundamental change in health care, and I want to talk about that from a local perspective. I want to talk very quickly about education and then for the remainder of the time that I have available to me, I just want to speak about what I intend to do this session — what some of my goals are in terms of addressing the needs of Columbia River-Revelstoke.

To begin with health care, there are four concerns that I would ask government to consider as it looks at what it is describing as transformative change. These are things that people within Columbia River-Revelstoke will be concerned about.

The first is with health change at all. Over the last five years the Kootenays have gone through what was a significant change in the way health care has been delivered. The changes for the most part were handled poorly. If you were to ask people in my part of the province — and that's all that I can speak for, but certainly I know for sure, having gone through the election process and going door to door — the perception of the vast majority of people is that the actual man-

agement of change was very, very poorly done. You had facilities closed before other facilities that were to replace them were ready. You had people displaced from the community. This is something I spoke to at length in the first speech that I gave to the House, so it's well documented. There is a fear that what can be expressed as bold, as something we shouldn't fear, on the ground it feels reckless and poorly thought through.

[1545]

As we look at what is described in pretty dramatic terms as another major change, I think we have to be mindful of the fact that the record on change is one that is, certainly in my part of the province, something that people are concerned about.

Now, having said that, I want to concede that change is not easy. I want to be clear that there are some things in seniors housing and in other health initiatives that have worked very well and are things that are to be commended, and that some of the directions the government was trying to go in are in fact logical. The point I'm making is around the management of change. That's the first issue that needs to be considered.

The second is around democratic decision-making with regard to health policy. The system that the government has put in place means that there's no direct accountability to rural communities through health authorities' board structure. That is something that was in place, and it's something that people felt there was value in. Over the last five years there have been a number of changes that the communities have tried to express themselves on, to make it clear that there were concerns they wanted the government to address. For the most part, that felt ignored, so if there's going to be another dramatic change, clearly there has to be a structure in place that allows communities, especially rural communities, to be heard on health policy.

At a different level, but with the same topic as around the mandate for change... If you look in the Liberal election platform, there were a lot of promises made around health, but there was no discussion during the past election about a fundamental change. The expectation that I would have, if there is going to be a dramatic change, is that there would be a mandate from the public that any dramatic change would be taken to the electorate, and that a clear mandate would be given to government to make the sorts of changes that they are talking about or alluding to.

Third, there is a concern about privatization in general, and the concern is this. A medical service should go to those who need it, based on need — not on where they live, who they are or, certainly, whether they're able to pay. Privatization can change things fundamentally. There is a suspicion, and I think the suspicion is warranted, that with a lot of money to be made, there are going to be interests and pressures on government to create business opportunities. While there's nothing necessarily completely wrong with that, there is the public good that needs to be looked after here, and it is our responsibility to make sure that the public good is looked after.



Within the document and within the throne speech there was actually an attempt to calm people's fears about the private system that we see across the border, the system that we're most familiar with, which is the American system. Nevertheless, people have a justified reason for fearing privatization. I've spent most of my life in Canada under a system that, when I'm sick, looks after my own interests and those of my family. It's something that I greatly appreciated. I also spent six years in Africa, where I essentially dealt with a private system that looked at a privileged few and took care of the health concerns of those privileged few.

The experience I have from that is that even if you have access, as part of the privileged group, to health care, it's something that doesn't work well. It doesn't work well because you're in amongst people who are unhealthy. Therefore it's difficult to stay healthy yourself, and you see things that you are not going to be morally comfortable with seeing. I think as a people all of us want to make sure that if somebody is in misery or needs help, we're able to help them. The most efficient way to do that is through a public health system. The history of Canada putting together this system is something that we certainly don't want to take for granted.

There is also concern that a private system, if it is going to save money.... If you're going to get savings through privatization, you do that by removing services to certain people.

[1550]

Certainly with the Liberal government, there are many examples of the disadvantaged being treated poorly. The concern with health reform would be that you would again see services removed from poorer people, and that's where the savings would come from.

The fourth thing is around centralization in health care. The rural communities, through the Social Credit and the New Democrats, had social infrastructure subsidized. You don't have the economies of scale in a small rural community, so you did have services, and communities would find it difficult to provide those same sorts of services if you went to a strict business model. There was a concern then, as well, about centralization and the impact that it has on communities, especially the rural communities that I represent.

So those four things.... If we're talking about health care, the throne speech is, of course, very vague. We will get more details as time goes on. The four concerns are around how change is managed, around the democratic control of the direction, around the direction that privatization can take us, and around centralization and the impact that it has on rural communities.

With education there was discussion as well. It was the second issue. There again, this is something that we've had an opportunity to talk about at great length in the first session. I assume that in the second session, we will see some specifics that were referred to in the throne speech and that there will be an opportunity again to talk about those as an educator. It's a topic that, of course, I care a great deal about and that I look forward to talking about again as we look at specifics.

I can tell you that a trustee asked me if I had any sense of the direction that the government is going. I don't have a clear sense. I hope in this session to get a number of questions answered by government. I look forward to that.

For the remainder of my time — and I need to get to a meeting fairly soon — I would like to talk about the things I intend to do during the session and the objectives I have. These are, of course, of a local nature but are nevertheless very important to the people that I represent. I want to give a bit of credit to some of the things that I think are going very, very well. One of the things I intend to do is to give full credit to the Minister of Transportation, who is here, for the positive work that he's doing on the Kicking Horse project.

The Kicking Horse project is a project that most people within the Legislature will not see, but it is an incredible project. It is a difficult, extremely expensive piece of highway to fix. There has been a long time that people have tried to get this project underway. That it is happening is significant and important.

I would also like to commend the minister for his commitment to providing money to a divided four-lane highway from Kamloops to the Alberta border. If this were to happen, it needs federal funding to match it. If this were to happen, it would be significant.

The second thing I intend to show appreciation for is to the Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts for her active support for the Burgess Shale project, the Rocky Mountain earth science centre. This is a tremendous project and one that her efforts will be appreciated very much on.

The third thing, and this is the last of the things I intend to show appreciation for, is the....

Interjection.

**N. Macdonald:** I can stop right now.

It's the initiatives that came to fruition and that speak very well of my predecessor Wendy McMahon: the tourist visitor site, the new highway scales in Golden, two new schools in Revelstoke and the mine museum in Kimberley. All of these are moving along this session, and they are things I support a great deal.

Moving on to other things I want to work on. I want to advocate as strongly as possible for the community's health care needs. We've issued a health report, where we basically have put together all of the issues that were raised by constituents. There are a number of them to be worked through. It's our intention to do this every six months and to work towards improving the health care system that people depend upon in our area.

Next, I intend to work over the long term with people on both sides of the House to try to re-establish the idea of a social contract existing between communities and the resources that surround them. I hope to talk during this session about taxation for dams and reservoirs, something I feel is an important discussion to have.

[1555]

I want to also look at some sort of form of return to appurtenance. I think it was a mistake to change that. I think it's important to have a community tied to the resource that's around it.

I intend to support B.C. border businesses. I'm glad that the Minister of Revenue moved away from the Costco plan. I'm sure that there are a number of people happy with that. I hope that the reaction was enough to dissuade any similar plan. The solution to the B.C. cross-boundary shopping issue lies with the government's will to solve it and in listening to the local government group that has put forward some very important ideas, as well as the local Chambers. That's something that I hope to continue to work on.

I intend to continue to raise the issue of the reorganization of the office of the fire commissioner. In fact, that's a meeting I'll be going to fairly shortly with the minister. It is a very poorly considered reorganization. Almost to a person in the Kootenays, certainly, fire chiefs have said that it is a mistake. The direction that the reorganization of the office of the fire commissioner is going needs to be reconsidered, and that's something that I will take forward.

I intend to push for the conservation officer in Golden, and I hope that's something that will take place. This was a commitment that was made during the election. It is something that is desperately needed. We have a tremendous number of issues resulting from the lack of a conservation officer in the area, and it's something that I hope to see changed.

Another issue that I'll be working on relates to Jumbo and Jumbo Glacier Resort. This is a land use issue that has been going on for over 15 years. In my part of the province it's one of tremendous interest. We have received over 600 people indicating how they feel about the project. Almost 20 to 1 are against. The principle that's at stake here is one of local control and local democracy. Jumbo Glacier Resort sits not in a pristine wilderness area but well away from any other development. What the community is telling me very clearly is that they do not want development in that area. There are a number of reasons for that. What I hope to do over this session is make sure that people understand the reasons why the community and the communities feel so strongly. It's very rare that I receive.... Well, I have never received 600 indications of views — letters, e-mails and phone calls — on any particular issue, so it's one that needs to be considered carefully.

I'll also be working on a related land use issue, Columbia Lake Park. The idea that a class-A parks boundary would be changed to benefit a commercial interest is one that I feel strongly should not take place. It would set a disturbing precedent, I think. We'll be talking about that. I've heard strongly from first nations groups on the issue, from local government and, of course, from a lot of residents. So that's one that will come up in this session.

I intend to support efforts to protect caribou, but this is one that needs to be done with great care. There are potential social and economic impacts to communi-

ties within my riding, so I support the effort. But here again, government has to listen very carefully to people on the ground.

I intend to work on forestry issues. Forestry is of critical importance to the economy of most of my communities. This is something that the provincial government touches in so many different ways. It definitely needs to do things properly, whether it's with stumpage or worker safety, how it deals with pine beetle, the softwood lumber dispute and even with community transition if there are mill closures.

All of these are issues of crucial importance to my constituency. First nations issues; issues around fairness in my riding; the minimum wage; income assistance, especially for long-term disability; WCB; housing; post-secondary access and cost; mental health issues — all of these are things that have been raised by people in the riding. Over the session I hope to make progress on all of them.

[1600]

To finish, I just want to thank you very much for the opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne. I'm certainly looking forward to a productive session.

**J. Yap:** I am pleased to follow the hon. member for Columbia River-Revelstoke. He was starting to use words like "logical," "commended" and things that he liked. For a moment I thought there was a mixup in the speaking order and a government member was speaking before me. I thank him for those positive comments.

I am pleased to rise to speak in support of the throne speech as the member for the great riding of Richmond-Steveston. I am grateful to the people of my riding for the privilege to be here in this House, to represent them, to work on their behalf as their member and to participate in the debates on the important issues of our times.

I am proud of the accomplishments of our B.C. Liberal government. In just four short years our government has turned British Columbia around. In terms of our economy, we have gone from last place to first in Canada, leading the nation in job creation, with our credit rating restored to second-best among the provinces. British Columbia is once again a preferred destination for investment dollars and as a place to do business, live and raise a family.

In terms of health care, as a result of innovations fostered by our government, we have the highest-rated health care system among the provinces. We are number one. In terms of K-to-12 public education, we have achieved record high school graduation rates, and our students lead the way in mathematics, reading and science. In terms of advanced education, our government is undertaking the largest expansion of post-secondary positions in 40 years, with a goal of 25,000 new positions within a decade. In terms of governance, our government has been an innovator, leading the nation with such changes as fixed election dates, establishing an opposition Deputy Speaker, expanded ques-

tion period, establishing an opposition-controlled parliamentary committee and renewing a commitment to revisit the single transferable vote.

Ours is a government of action, of getting results for the people of British Columbia. Our government has the courage to challenge the status quo. We are not afraid to ask the tough questions.

There is today a renewed sense of confidence and optimism in British Columbia, thanks to our government and the hard work of British Columbians. In my travels through my riding and beyond, I listen to the voices of ordinary folks: working people, small business owners, parents, seniors and youth — you know, the people we might meet with at the local coffee or donut shop.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

These people tell me that they are grateful for the changes our government has brought in to make our British Columbia a better place, whether it is in re-igniting our economy through sound fiscal policies, cutting red tape, encouraging investment, reforming social services, improving public safety or investing in our health and education systems. Real leadership, real progress — that's what our B.C. Liberal government has delivered and will continue to deliver.

The throne speech sets the stage for British Columbians to build on the successes of the past five years towards an even brighter future. Other members have already spoken about the emphasis made in the throne speech on transformation — in particular, the need for transformation of our health care system.

For as much as we can be proud of our health care system in B.C., we can do better, and we must do better. We must tackle the apparent health care conundrum, that being that despite spending billions and billions more on health care over the years, British Columbians' satisfaction levels with our health care system remain low.

Comparatively, Canada's health care system, as far as quality, access and outcomes, has been ranked 11th among developed countries in spite of spending on health care that is third among these countries as a percentage of GDP. Only Iceland and Switzerland spend more than Canada on health care.

[1605]

We all need health care at every stage of our life. However, the fact is that as we age, quite naturally we increasingly need more health care services. We know that the tidal wave of aging baby-boomers will place more demands on the health care system. Simply spending billions more without finding ways to improve the system is untenable.

As a junior member of the baby-boom demographic, this is a concern for me personally, as I'm sure it is for all members of this House and for all British Columbians.

**I. Black:** Junior member?

**J. Yap:** Yes, a junior member.

If we as a province are facing financial challenges when one in seven of us is a senior, it does not take a genius to figure out that when one in four of us is a senior, we face the prospect of financial calamity if we do nothing today and simply accept the status quo. We have the opportunity at this time in our history to make fundamental changes — changes which will strengthen our health care system so that it is there not just for our generation but for the next, changes which will incorporate the best practices of other successful health care systems in other jurisdictions by allowing certain health care services to be delivered by means other than the public system.

No developed country in the world — not one — with a publicly funded health care system outlaws access to a parallel private health care system except Canada. It just seems logical that if something is self-evident, maybe there is a correlation between having mixed public-private health systems and better health care. That's why that Canada Health Act needs to be revisited, and I'm proud that British Columbia is leading the debate here to ask the federal government to look at amending the act to include sustainability as a sixth principle of medicare.

Government members, including myself, are not afraid to embrace change, to consider transformative change, to position our great province to better meet the vast challenges that lie ahead for our health care system. Opposition members have made plain their disdain for considering change or transformation or innovation because it apparently scares them, or more importantly, it scares their special interest supporters.

The fundamental questions asked in the throne speech make such common sense that it seems to defy logic why the hon. NDP members of this House, without exception, are so vehemently opposed to their being asked. One can only draw the conclusion that the opposition is either generally stuck in some kind of suspended state of denial or that they don't really believe their rhetoric and are just speaking to a narrow audience which helped them to get elected.

I'm proud that the throne speech asks the fundamental and tough questions like: does it really matter to patients where or how they obtain their surgical treatment if it's paid for with public funds? Clearly, it did not to the NDP's national leader. Or questions like: why are we afraid to look at mixed health care delivery models when other states in Europe and around the world have used them to produce better results for patients at a lower cost to taxpayers? Studies have shown this to be the case, and yet there's a fear of asking these questions.

I would add another question: why is privatization such a scary word to members of the opposition when it's been shown to work in other countries? Why the knee-jerk, automatic, instinctive negative reaction on the part of the NDP and their friends to considering real reform of our health care system where publicly funded and for-profit health care can co-exist?

These are the questions that all British Columbians will be asked to help answer in a meaningful dialogue

over the next several months. I'm looking forward to this dialogue, as I believe are most British Columbians. We need a dialogue that rises above the rhetoric of special interest groups and partisan politics. We need a reasoned debate which draws on factual information and input from as many sources of information and expertise as we can draw on. We then need to craft out of this dialogue a made-in-B.C. solution to bringing about the needed transformation of our health care system.

Instead of criticizing the plans of our Premier and Health Minister to go directly to the European countries to study their health care systems, which work well, the opposition should be encouraging this fact-finding exercise on behalf of all British Columbians. Instead of fear-mongering that somehow this dialogue will change our health care system to one which is American-style health care when our government unreservedly commits to building on a strong public system in Canada, the opposition should take a moment to reflect that it was under the NDP that B.C. had its first private for-profit clinics to help improve the public system.

[1610]

The fact is that we already have a two-tiered system of health care here in British Columbia. There, I said it — we have a two-tiered system — and there's no bolt of lightning. I mean this tongue-in-cheek, of course, as it seems like it's heresy to suggest this fact when we have a two-tiered health care system — as some of the opposition would suggest.

If a British Columbian is injured at work and requires a surgical procedure, he or she can jump ahead of the wait-list and be treated at a private surgery under the auspices of WorkSafe B.C. If the same British Columbian were to be injured at home or at play, he or she would not have that access to the private surgery and would have to wait in line. Does it not follow that we should look at all options, including use of for-profit surgeries, to allow all British Columbians to have more timely access to quality medical procedures and other health services, not just those who have had the good fortune of being injured while at work?

I think reasonable folks not wedded to a particular policy dogma would say yes, as long as we continue to protect, to invest in and to improve our public medicare system. In light of the recent Chaoulli decision in Quebec, we must continue to act and to preserve public health care for all British Columbians for now and for the future.

As was mentioned in the throne speech, there was a 35-percent increase in the number of hip replacements and a 65-percent increase in the number of knee replacements performed in B.C. In spite of our success in providing more joint replacement surgeries in British Columbia, the backlog of people waiting for operations has grown. There is that coming tidal wave of baby-boomers. That's why I'm pleased to support the government's \$60.5 million strategy to address this problem.

My community of Richmond has shown leadership in this area. In 2004 Richmond Hospital began the in-

novative joint-replacement-surgery pilot project. The provincial government, Vancouver Coastal Health and Richmond Hospital established this project to reduce wait times for hip and knee replacements, and the project has been an outstanding success. The government provided \$500,000 to start this project, and the Richmond Hospital Foundation and the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority each contributed \$400,000 to renovate and open a sixth operating room at the hospital to accommodate the surgeries.

Richmond's joint-replacement project used the operating room more efficiently to perform knee and hip replacement surgeries. Standardized equipment, supplies and prostheses were used, and the project achieved a 40-percent increase in the number of joint replacement surgeries performed. This project furthers our government's goal to build the best system of support for B.C.'s seniors by improving the mobility, health and quality of life for our seniors. This project has been so successful that UBC Hospital is setting up two operating rooms to duplicate this initiative in Vancouver, and I'm sure that this pioneering project will benefit the lives of countless senior citizens across B.C.

Furthermore, in regards to the care of seniors, I'm proud of the great progress made in increasing the number of beds as part of the commitment to build 5,000 net new beds by 2008.

**D. Chudnovsky:** By when?

**J. Yap:** By 2008.

I recently had the opportunity to visit Rosewood Manor, a seniors campus-of-care facility in my riding which is undergoing a major expansion with 30 additional beds for a seniors complex care project, which is proceeding as planned. A further 50 beds will be added in the heart of Steveston with the SUCCESS Austin Harris assisted-living residence. Groundbreaking for this project is planned in the next month or so, with completion in 2007. Clearly, we're making progress.

[1615]

This government also recognizes the basic fact that in order to meet increasing demands on health care costs, you need more people to provide treatment. That's why I'm proud to be part of a government that nearly doubled the number of doctors in training and increased the number of nurse training spaces by more than 60 percent. This record contrasts sharply with the NDP's dismal decade of closing hospital beds, eliminating full-time nursing positions and freezing the level of doctors in training.

The throne speech also makes clear our government's commitment to improving a public education system. I'm pleased the Premier and Education Minister will be embarking on a tour of all the school districts in the province to conference with parents, teachers, administrators, trustees and students so that collectively we can work to further improve our K-to-12 school system, which is actually working quite well.

I'm optimistic that the transprovincial meetings, along with the first-ever teachers congress, will build

on the work of the Learning Round Table, which continues to meet to find ways to improve our education system. This change is needed to ensure that the increasing investments in our education system produce the outcomes which we all desire, and that is the great goal of British Columbia being the most literate and educated jurisdiction in North America.

As with the dialogue over the kind of health care system we want and need in this province, we will need to ask the fundamental questions as well — questions like: what more can we do to help all students in every classroom, and what more can we do to ensure greater accountability to taxpayers? These questions and others are very relevant, especially when you consider that our government has increased funding for K-to-12 schools at a time when enrolment has been declining by approximately 30,000 over the last five years.

In 2005-2006, per-student funding was increased to \$7,097 — the highest ever. Since 2000-2001, education funding has increased by \$880 per student, including the \$345 per-student increase resulting from the new funding of \$150 million added in 2005. In fiscal 2000-2001, operating funding for K-to-12 public education was \$3.889 billion. In 2005-2006 this operating funding is \$4.264 billion. This represents an increase of \$375 million. Yet all we hear from the opposition is that the B.C. Liberals have made cuts to education, and they repeat it over and over and over again so that some people start to believe this, when the facts say otherwise.

We need to have a reasoned dialogue so teachers continue to feel, as many do, that theirs is a noble profession — special — and that they're trying to help shape our future citizens. They rightly should feel proud to be teachers here in British Columbia.

I found this to be the case as I have made my own personal visits to the schools of school district 38, Richmond, within my riding of Richmond-Steveston. During these visits I heard lots of feedback from teachers that their underlying desire is to feel respected. I personally have nothing but the greatest respect for our teachers. I acknowledge their commitment and dedication to their profession. I know that teachers don't do what they do for the money or status. Teachers teach because of a passion to impart knowledge to our young and to contribute to future generations by preparing our students for the future through the teaching process.

Let me say, as well, that no one argues that teachers should not be paid fairly, and I believe that by and large they are. I look forward to the findings of the Ready report, which we all hope, along with the other initiatives mentioned, will lead to a more positive negotiating environment between the teachers, the union, the employer districts and government, so that we can move forward with what is important. That's to continue to provide our students with the best possible education in a sustainable way.

The throne speech referred to the economic opportunities for British Columbia as Canada's Pacific province. The government's Asia-Pacific Initiative will allow British Columbians to take advantage of the op-

portunities presented to us by being on the crossroads between Asia-Pacific and North America. B.C. is the gateway for Asia to North America and in reverse.

This is good for Richmond, as our highly skilled immigrant population is uniquely positioned to take advantage of the global economy. We have people with the skills — culturally, linguistically and in business — who can do business with the world. Our airport, Vancouver International Airport, brings us closer to the world and facilitates the flow of investment and travel to and from Richmond and British Columbia for business.

[1620]

One of the innovative strategies of the Asia-Pacific Initiative includes the Dream Home China project. With the ongoing softwood lumber dispute with the United States and all of the negative impacts on British Columbia families and communities and on our province as a whole, I'm pleased that the government is expanding the markets for our lumber. I was pleased to hear in the throne speech that new Dream Home China projects will be developed in Beijing and Guangzhou. The original in Shanghai was an outstanding success, and I'm glad that the government is building on this success. In 2005 the then Minister of Forests travelled to Shanghai with several members of this House to showcase the China dream home constructed to demonstrate the potential that B.C. lumber has for Chinese housing. The dream home was constructed in partnership with our forestry sector.

China constructs 10 million new homes a year — a new housing market that's five times larger than in the United States. Not many of these homes are built of wood, but even if a modest percentage switched to lumber construction, that would be a huge opportunity for British Columbia. This project was more than simply a house. The most important components were to help China update their building codes and new training programs for builders in order to make it easier for Chinese builders to construct new wood-frame housing from our lumber.

The first presentation centre was so successful that JinQiao, the firm that built the presentation centre, immediately started building several hundred units of wood-frame housing. It is initiatives like Dream Home China that will help to minimize the impact of the softwood lumber dispute with the United States and will ensure loggers and foresters find quality jobs that will support themselves and their families, and see them continue to contribute to their communities.

I'm proud of our government's commitment to continue to strengthen public safety. As stated in the throne speech, our provincial government is pushing the federal government for new minimum sentences for drug dealers. Drug dealers prey on addicted people, offering only a life of misery as they encourage harmful addictions. It is time that the severity of their crimes be recognized in the federal Criminal Code. My constituents are concerned about the lenient sentences awarded to dealers, and it's time for the federal government to act to protect our communities.

I'd also like to talk about another ongoing problem in my riding which I feel that the federal government needs to address, and that is the problem of street racing. While some associate this reckless behaviour with Richmond, it's a problem for all British Columbians, the problem of street racing and excessive speeding. Too many people have been taken from their families and loved ones so that a reckless driver could experience the quick adrenaline rush they feel in their speeding car.

Our provincial government took action to address this problem. We stiffened penalties, allowed the police to impound cars for 30 days, ramped up enforcement and improved the new driver licensing program. Our government also gave 100 percent of traffic fine revenues to municipalities to enable them to better deal with traffic issues. ICBC provided resources to pay for more overtime for police to target street racers. The city of Richmond spent \$250,000 to better equip our RCMP force to stop street races, with positive results.

Almost everyone has stepped up to the plate to help solve this problem, and it's now time for the federal government to do their part. All too often street racers receive a mere slap on the wrist: 18 months for criminal negligence causing death, three years' probation or conditional sentences. The courts are carrying out the law as it's written, we should emphasize, so it's time to change the law to provide one more disincentive against street racing.

The late Chuck Cadman had two bills to stiffen sentences for vehicular crimes. The previous federal government promised to pass these bills, but they died on the order paper when the parliament was dissolved last year. With a new federal government recently elected, I'd like to renew my call upon the federal government to act to stiffen sentences for vehicular crimes causing death. Too many people have died needlessly, and all levels of government need to work together to solve this problem.

[1625]

In closing, I'd like to commend our government for having the courage to start a genuine dialogue with British Columbians to transform our health care system; for initiatives to reform our public education system; for strategically leading us towards the Asia-Pacific to create more wealth and opportunities for all British Columbians; for strengthening public safety; and for continuing to build on our strengths as a people so that generations from now, historians will look back and judge that those of us present here today in this first decade of the new millennium truly made a magnificent difference to our province and country.

*Splendor sine occasu.* How fitting our provincial motto is as we embark on this golden decade.

**H. Bains:** It's once again my honour and privilege to stand here today and have my say and input on the throne speech and have my say on the direction in which this government is trying to take this province. I'm proud to represent the members of Surrey-Newton, and I'm really honoured to be the voice of the Surrey-

Newton constituency. Since the end of last session I had the opportunity to meet with many individuals in my constituency — many service providers, teachers, parents, health care workers, seniors, youths — who, in their pursuit to improve conditions in their neighbourhood schools, hospitals, parks, streets and workplaces, gave me their input as to how to pursue that goal.

My purpose is not to criticize the government for the sake of criticizing. I will make an attempt to provide a positive critique of the direction I believe this government has laid out in the throne speech and, at the same time, try to offer alternatives that I believe would provide a more inclusive approach to deal with the issues important to the public — an approach where no one is left behind.

I will try to touch on a number of issues mentioned in the throne speech. I'm pleased to hear that health care is referenced in quite a few places in the throne speech. In particular, I'm really happy to see that reference is made to Surrey Memorial Hospital. After years of neglect and under pressure from five New Democrat MLAs from Surrey and North Delta, at least this government is starting to talk about crisis situations in Surrey Memorial Hospital.

On how we got to this point, I will provide a bit of a background. After four and a half years of neglect, the Premier finally decided to visit Surrey just before the last election. That visit was seen by my constituents as an attempt to save Liberal seats in the coming election rather than going there to understand and to fix the health care issues of the area. That is unfortunate, because when the public starts to have doubts in their elected leaders, they lose faith in politicians, and they turn away from politics. That is not good for democracy and certainly is not good for democratic society.

The Premier ended up making promises to fix our health care issues, by announcing to fast-track a study that would determine what was needed to deal with the fastest-growing city in B.C. The public of Surrey was very skeptical of this government, especially this Premier, because this Premier had a history of making lofty statements and promises with no resources to back them up — those promises that were only to be broken later. They believe that the Premier will not deliver on this promise either.

As a result, the public elected four NDP MLAs in Surrey and one in North Delta to send a strong message to the Premier and to this government that (1) they do not trust this government's promises anymore and (2) this government had better pay attention to the needs of the patients in need of health care services in the region. Now our constituents know that their concerns are brought to this House, and finally the government is talking about Surrey Memorial Hospital.

[1630]

The people of Surrey are still very much concerned with the speed at which this government is moving to deal with long waits in ER departments, dirty conditions in hospital rooms, inedible food, and lack of support for doctors, nurses and other health care providers. The message from Surrey is that we do not need

more promises. We do not need to plan the plans. We need action, and we need something done immediately.

Last week we heard this government bragging about their record in the area of health care, suggesting what a wonderful job they have done to improve our health care services. It clearly shows that this government is out of touch with reality. I would like to invite this Premier and the Health Minister to speak to my constituents, like Mr. Reid, who went to Surrey Memorial Hospital ER to get treatment for his eye problems. After waiting hours and suffering for hours in the ER department, he was told he would have to wait hours more before a doctor could see him. He left without treatment for Delta Hospital, where he was treated and sent home.

Many other patients have to sit for hours in pain in the ER department before they are seen by a doctor, and many still leave without seeing a doctor. That is a tragedy in the region we represent, and I think this government clearly shows, by bragging how wonderful things are in the health care sector, how far out of touch they are from the needs of the public in Surrey.

In the throne speech the government went on to say that they will be touring many European countries to learn to improve B.C.'s health care. My suggestion to the Premier is that instead of going on this tour and wasting taxpayers' dollars, he should sit down with people in health care, sit down with health care unions and other stakeholders, and start a real dialogue with them in an attempt to come up with creative, innovative and practical solutions.

The problem faced today with health care is this Premier's obsession with privatization. It is demoralizing our health care providers. It leaves patients without proper health care and is hurting too many people.

Mr. Premier, if you are serious about fixing our health care system, give up your obsession about privatization of health care services, and look for real solutions. The first thing you should do is commit to the Canada Health Act. There is nothing wrong with the Canada Health Act, Mr. Premier. You don't like it, because it stands in the way of your privatization schemes. Privatization schemes, privatization attempts, have failed the constituents of Surrey. All you have to do is come to Surrey Memorial Hospital.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member. Member, you need to address your remarks to the Chair rather than to another member.

**H. Bains:** I will move on to talk about K-to-12 education.

A member from Richmond, just before I stood up, said we should talk about facts. Let's talk about facts. He said that enrolment is lower in B.C., but let me remind this House that enrolment in Surrey is higher. We have fewer teachers. We have fewer teacher-librarians. We have fewer special needs teachers in Surrey. Those are the facts, and they have been ignored by this government.

Last year we witnessed our students losing a record number of school days in the history of this province. The reason behind it was that this government was bent on picking a fight with our teachers. They wanted to teach our teachers a lesson for standing up for our students and parents and, above all, our teachers' decision to stand up for the education of our children.

It was, indeed, a proud moment for me to stand in this House with the rest of my New Democratic colleagues and speak against Bill 12 and speak in favour of education, in favour of our students. We held this government to account for their ill-thought-out approach. Only when faced with public outrage did this government decide to sit down with teachers and other stakeholders to talk about ending the dispute.

[1635]

On behalf of the public, this side of the House will be watching very closely. We will make sure that the government deals with teachers fairly in the upcoming negotiations. We will be watching that the class sizes are dealt with. We will be watching that class composition is dealt with fairly so that our children can get the education and the care they need and deserve.

Post-secondary education under this government is becoming more and more out of reach for many of our students, who cannot afford exorbitant hikes in tuition fees in the last four and a half years. Lack of direction for skills training and dismantling of our training and apprenticeship programs have caused a huge shortage in skilled trades. I'm disappointed to see no real vision shown in this area in the throne speech. We have a long way to go and a government that just does not seem to understand the pieces that are needed to be brought together. Government should show leadership by working with the workers, industry and educators and bringing back apprenticeship programs that start to train workers in the skilled trades.

We will talk about economic fairness, or unfairness, in this province. Everyday families in B.C. are bearing the brunt of this government's uncaring policies, especially those who are most vulnerable in our society — our seniors, our children, the sick and poor. More and more people are depending on food banks. More homeless today than when this government took office clearly shows that this government has created a society of winners and losers. Big corporations and millionaire friends of this government are getting breaks by this government at the expense of ordinary families.

Then there is a culture of disempowerment created by this government. The saddest part of this government's policies is that in the last five years in power this government has created a culture of disempowerment. Teachers are told that they are not entitled to the support they need in the classroom. Special needs students are denied the special care and support they need to help themselves through their classroom needs. Hospital workers were told that they were not entitled to the benefits negotiated in their collective agreement and saw before their eyes their legally negotiated collective agreements ripped up — something that was unheard of in a democratic society.

Forestry workers are told that they're not entitled to the benefits of a social contract that existed to provide community stability and forestry jobs for workers living in those communities. They see logs that were harvested to provide jobs for them in logging and manufacturing being exported to create jobs in other countries. They are advised that they are not entitled to health and safety protection. All you have to do is look at the safety record in the forest industry in the last four and a half years: a record number of deaths and still no clear vision, no clear direction to stop the carnage in the forest industry.

Through the introduction of Bill 71, our seniors who live in manufactured homes are denied proper compensation that once existed and are faced with bankruptcies and inconvenience that they do not need or can't live through in the latter part of their years. All of this is happening to our seniors — who built this country and this province for us to enjoy — when the government is bragging about surpluses.

WCB is another area. Workers injured on their jobs are told that they do not deserve benefits that they were entitled to before. They're treated with contempt. They're spied on, forced back to work when they're not ready, and recent reports in the media suggest that some are even driven to suicide due to the ill treatment that they have received.

Women and children who are in need of government help have their support centres closed. Benefits cut; funding cut. I'm deeply disappointed to see that there is no mention to change this culture of disentanglement that this government has created in the last four and a half years. There is none whatsoever in the throne speech. I'm afraid that this culture of disentanglement will continue to exist and that people will continue to suffer, thanks to the direction of this government.

[1640]

I'll touch on the Olympics. This is an area that we should all be proud of. This is an event that will be unfolding before our eyes where we have a huge potential of economic benefits for all regions of this province, for all sectors of this economy. But recent reports of a cost overrun are casting a shadow of doubt in people's minds at this point, a shadow of doubt that is not needed to make these Olympics a successful story and a benefit to all.

We don't need the culture of secrecy that has been created by this government — people not knowing how much they would be asked to pay, not knowing where this cost overrun is going. They're not satisfied so far with this government's action of not having the Auditor General as an independent body to monitor and report to the public, to see whether we are getting a benefit for the dollars that are being spent on behalf of the public. This is negative publicity that is cast around the Olympics and is not needed. This government should be held responsible for that.

I'll talk about the forest industry a bit. This Forestry Revitalization Act was brought in with the promise that this industry will be reinvesting into the forest industry. What have we seen in the last four and a half

years? The workers have seen nothing but layoffs, more plant closures and the investment being invested on the other side of the border, not in B.C.

Sawmills are moved from the lower mainland across the line just 20 kilometres away, and our jobs are being shipped away. Raw log exports are on the increase ever since this government took over — logs that should be used here to create jobs in British Columbia for British Columbians and to provide community stability. This government gave everything to the forest industry and nothing for the workers, nothing for the communities where they live.

The social contract that was once a part of the Forest Act is ripped up. There is no longer a social contract existing between the companies and this province. The companies were given our resources on our behalf to create jobs in those communities that are forestry-dependent and provide jobs for those workers both in manufacturing and logging. Right now there's no requirement left for the industry to create jobs in return for using the raw materials that we are giving them. That is a very sad day, because it has caused nothing but job losses and plant closures.

We have seen that because of the cuts in the WCB there's no more enforcement left in the forest industry — very, very little, if there's any. As a result, people are hurting, more so than ever before. People are dying and being killed, and government is sitting idly by not doing anything.

There is no vision about the mountain pine beetle epidemic. There's nothing in the throne speech to talk about what those communities would be doing after those logs are harvested. There's no vision whatsoever. I'm really disappointed.

One of the fundamental rights that we all enjoy in this democratic society is our human rights. That is another attempt by this government to remove.... By removing the Human Rights Commission, they are telling the world and are telling us that they're not committed to protecting and promoting human rights.

They are saying that we have a tribunal. The tribunal was always there. Tribunals deal with issues after the fact when somebody is already hurt, when someone is discriminated against. Someone has already suffered humiliation as a result of those experiences.

The Human Rights Commission was a proactive approach. It was used to educate the public. It was used to educate our education system. It was used to educate our employers. It was used to promote harmony, to promote different cultures and understanding between those cultures. That is no longer there, and to my disappointment, again, there is nothing in the throne speech to change that.

[1645]

We were elected to represent people where we decided to run as MLAs. We are elected to make decisions on their behalf. In the past we made many decisions. Some were good decisions; some, I would say today, were not very good decisions. I want to reflect back 50 years or 100 years. There were some wonderful decisions made in this House that we all enjoy, and



society is better as a result of those. But I can tell you that there were times when decisions were made that today, when we reflect back and review those decisions....

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

The people who sat in these chairs in those days probably would be saying that they shouldn't have made those decisions. One of those decisions in this House, back in 1907, was to deny to visible minorities their right to citizenship. Today when we look back, we think: "What a bad decision. We shouldn't have done that."

That's what I think we should be doing as elected members: making a decision that will stand the test of time when we are no longer around here, when people sitting in these chairs 50 years or 100 years down the road would look back at the decisions we have made and would be proud that we made those good decisions. Many times as politicians we are tempted to make decisions that are popular with the public and that we think will get us elected, but they may not be the right decisions. I urge all of you, everyone in this House, to make sure that we make those decisions that will stand the test of time when our grandchildren and their grandchildren are looking back and reading *Hansard* — that they would be proud of those decisions and that the decisions weren't made because they were popular but because they were the right decisions.

I am disappointed that many decisions I see coming before us which this government has made in the past few years were made because they believed they were popular decisions that would get them elected again. But I can tell you that in years to come, we will be reflecting that those decisions were not the right decisions — like ripping up a legally negotiated collective agreement, like elimination of the Human Rights Commission. Those would be considered to be bad decisions as years go by, and we would be feeling disappointed at that time.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I conclude my remarks.

**D. MacKay:** Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the Speech from the Throne, which was read on February 14 by Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor.

The member who just spoke, the member for Surrey-Newton, made the comment that there was no leadership from this side of the House, the government side of the House. I just wanted to remind the member opposite that the very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision, and a vision is what the Speech from the Throne is all about. It is a vision of where this government wants to take the people of this province for the next year and into the future.

That's what the Speech from the Throne was all about, but it means different things to different sides of the House, obviously. It means one thing to the government side of the House and something else to the opposition side of the House.

Let me see if I can encapsulate what I've heard from the NDP so far. First of all, the Speech from the Throne,

as I said, from the government's perspective, is where the government wants to take the people from this province down in the future. Let's stop and think about what the NDP have been saying lately as we enter into the debate on the throne speech. What I've heard so far....

[1650]

I guess being a grandfather kind of helps me draw this comparison with the NDP and the government of the day. As a grandfather at Christmastime, I get the opportunity with my grandchildren to open up some of those new toys. Some of those new toys are pretty exciting, because they have batteries in them, and they make all sorts of different noises. If you look at a police car or a fire engine with the batteries in them today, you can turn a battery on to a beep or a siren, you can listen to a horn, or you can listen to a wail or a yelp. Or, I guess, if it's the case of an NDP member opening up the Christmas present, it probably has one more control on it. It's called a whine. That's all I've heard from the NDP so far — a whine about the good things that the government is trying to do for the people of this province.

The opening comment in there, where the Premier talks about travelling abroad with the Health Minister to listen to other people.... We're talking about trying to improve the health care system and the other services that we provide to the people of this province. We want to learn from people that are doing similar things in different parts of this world and doing it better. Of course, I'm referring to the health care system. That's why we're talking about travelling abroad.

The cost of sending the Premier and the Health Minister to those other countries is probably going to be a lot less than what it's going to cost for health care premiums if we don't stop and look at what's happening in other parts of the world, as other countries deliver health care better and to the satisfaction of their constituents. That's a critical component of what the Premier talks about when he is talking about travelling and listening to what's being done in Scandinavian countries as they deliver health care to their people.

I shouldn't have to remind you, but I'm going to remind you that today we consume 12.4 billion health care dollars in British Columbia. That's up from \$9.3 billion in 2001, when we were first elected as government.

I'm just going to take us back 40 years when health care was introduced in Canada, back in the '60s. For every person that was drawing on the health care system, there were 16 people contributing — 16 people contributing for every person that consumed dollars from the health care system. Today, 40 years later, we have seven people contributing for every one person that is consuming health care costs. Twenty-five years from now we are going to have four people. Based on the demographics of our province today, the aging population, we're going to have four people contributing to the health care system down the road.

Let's put that in a different perspective. Health care has been rising at roughly 8 percent a year. When you

talk \$12.4 billion, that's a lot of cash. Eleven years from now, based on the 8-percent increase annually, the health care budget will consume 71 percent of our entire provincial budget. Education today consumes 28 percent of our entire provincial budget.

If you look down the road, that's going to leave 1 percent to spend on other programs that people want and need in our province, such as roads, hydro — whatever else that government does provide to the people of the province. We're going to have 1 percent left to spend on those programs. Looking after children, looking after families in need, looking after persons with disabilities — we're only going to have 1 percent of our money left to spend on those.

Maybe it is time that we had another look at the way we deliver health care in this province. Let's look at all the programs we deliver. There's nothing wrong with going out and talking to people from around the world. We're all doing it for the betterment of our citizens. They're doing it over there in Norway for the betterment of their citizens, as we're trying to do the best we can over here in British Columbia.

Who in their right mind doesn't think we need to look at our health care system? That means going out and talking to people from around the world. I think there are roughly 33 on the opposition side of the House that think we shouldn't do that. As a matter of fact, I think I heard them mention just a few shorts moments ago that what we should do is consult with health unions, of the many people they suggested we should talk to. Well, that's probably a step in the right direction, but there are more people than union people who know how better to deliver health care. I think it is incumbent upon us as government and the Premier and the Health Minister to travel abroad to find out what they're doing in those other countries.

[1655]

What is wrong with vision and leadership? That's what the throne speech is all about: the ability to look at the future, identify problems that are developing and look at ways to resolve those issues. How do you resolve those issues? You talk to people that are delivering similar programs and delivering them better. I don't think that we should be so selfish and look at what is best for us today. I think what we have to do is look into the future, look down the road for the kids that are following us to make sure that what we enjoy today in the health care system, in our education system, is there for that next generation without bankrupting them. Yes, that involves change, and that means going out, talking to people, trying to find new ways, innovative ways to deliver health care.

In 2001, when we became government, we had a province that was in a pretty tight financial picture. We had to make some pretty drastic changes to turn this province around. Four and a half years later, let's look at the changes made in the health care system. Four and a half years later we have the best health care system in all of Canada. It's not perfect yet, but we have to look at ways that we can deliver those programs that aren't going to bankrupt the province.

Those changes that we made were the result of consultation with the people of this province. We went around when we were in opposition and we spoke to the people of this province. We asked them: "What can we do to make things better for the delivery of health care?" They told us; we listened; we acted. As I said just a short time ago, we were told that we have the number one health care system in all of Canada. That's a big credit to the people of this province who bit the bullet and travelled down that rough road with the government as we made those drastic changes.

One of the big issues we have... It may not be so evident down here in the lower mainland, but as we travel into the northern part of our province, we find a shortage of doctors, a shortage of nurses. I recall in the '90s when nursing positions were actually cut from the college system through Northwest Community College. The previous government stopped training nurses. There was very little training done on doctors. One of the things we heard as we travelled the province listening to people on health care was that we need more doctors, more nurses and more people in the health field.

So what did we do as a government? In four and a half years we are now training twice as many doctors through our university programs. We're training doctors in Prince George. We're going to be training them in Kelowna before too long. We're training nurses again. The number, I believe, is around 6,500 new nurses in the program. Those are all good things. They're good things for the people in this chamber, and they're great for the people of the province. They're great for our children and for the next generation. But it was done because we went out and consulted with the people. We had the courage and the vision to go and talk to people and ask them: "What do we need to do to make things better in this province?"

Nurse practitioners are being trained in this province for the first time and are graduating. They're going out and performing a much-valued service in areas where it's difficult to get doctors and other health professionals.

Travel for northern residents. I heard the member from Skeena talking about how difficult it is to get people from the northern part of the province to specialists. He said that nothing is being done. Well, just last week the Northern Health fulfilled a promise made by our government in 2001 when we said we would provide \$5 million to help move people around the northern part of the province to get them to specialists, to get them to hospitals where the health care that wasn't available in their communities was.

Just last week Northern Health embarked on a program where we now have big coaches running. They're designed to look after people who need health care. They travel from Prince Rupert to Prince George, from Prince George to Vancouver, and return. They travel from Fort Nelson down to Prince George, to Vancouver, return, at a very nominal cost to those people who need to travel for health reasons.

[1700]

So that's what we've done to help those people. That's what we've done for the people who live in the

north and have to travel for health reasons. There is now a bus service, a big coach service, available for those people. That wasn't there before. That was something we heard as we travelled around the province.

I hear it all the time because of the remoteness of the province that I live in — that health care is not equal to everybody, yet we all pay the same MSP premiums. They should be entitled to the same health care that the people in Victoria are or that is available to those in Vancouver. This is one way of helping to reach that goal to make sure that those people can access good health care in rural parts of our province.

New hospitals are being built. We just opened up a new wing at the Bulkley Valley District Hospital in Smithers. We've enlarged and upgraded the emergency ward and the X-ray unit at that hospital. I can tell you that two weeks ago when I went to the opening.... The staff that work in that facility are extremely grateful for the new facilities and are very happy to be working in those new facilities.

New surgical improvements. One of the things we hear so much about is the wait-list for surgery, particularly with hip and knee replacements. Goodness knows, we are all getting older. As we get older, we're going to start drawing on the health care system. We lead active lives. For some of us, our joints break down as we continue with our exercise programs. I don't want to be waiting too long when my turn comes for new knees, because I can already feel them at times when I'm running in the morning.

However, we are looking at new, innovative ways to make sure that the wait-lists for hip and knee replacements are shortened. We've done roughly a 65-percent increase in four and a half years on hip and knee replacements, so things are moving ahead. We are dedicating surgery rooms and teams specifically to deal with those issues, so that should shorten up the wait-lists.

That's what we're doing in the health care system. The people are telling us they want it. Because we had the courage to go out and talk to those people, we are moving in that direction, and people are getting better health care.

One of the things that was in the Speech from the Throne that caught my attention — and I have to give credit to the NDP member for Cariboo South for drawing it to my attention; I'd heard it, but I couldn't find it in the book — has to do with the major research investments to accelerate discovery in spinal cord research through the Rick Hansen Man in Motion. I want to comment on that more from a personal perspective.

I was in charge of the RCMP detachment in Smithers when Rick Hansen was doing his around-the-world tour. I took it upon myself, being in charge of the detachment.... I collected a dollar a member until he made it back to Canada. When he got back I had a \$600 pot sitting there that I had collected from the members. We made that donation to the Rick Hansen Man in Motion. There was a caveat to that in that we decided that we would draw names from a hat to see which member was going to get the tax credit for that. I'm

embarrassed to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that my name came out of the hat, and I got the tax credit.

It goes further than that, because I had just returned from a spinal injury unit at Shaughnessy. I had my neck broken in a car accident. I had a moose come through the windshield. So I spent considerable time at Shaughnessy in the spinal injury unit with screws in my head, hanging from pulleys. I'm pretty fortunate to be standing here in front of you today, and I am certainly pleased that our government is going to continue in support of the Rick Hansen spinal injury unit to try to improve the quality of life for those people who have and have suffered spinal injuries.

I'm hoping that we will eventually one day find a cure to put those people back on their feet. I can tell you that was a bit of a traumatic experience.

The other thing that I wanted to mention very briefly.... When I was lying in that hospital bed, trying to shave in the morning with a broken mirror, on my back, I didn't care who provided that service for me. I didn't ask, when people came in to take an X-ray every day: "Are you being paid for by the private sector or being paid for from the public sector?" I didn't really care. When I got my meals on a tray and had to look in the mirror to see what I was eating, I didn't ask who prepared it. I was grateful to get it.

I'm not too concerned about who delivers health care. The cleaning was the same thing. I wasn't able to see who cleaned the place, because I was on my belly, on that striker board, all the time.

[1705]

The delivery of health care shouldn't be such issue — as to who delivers it. Somebody is going to deliver. We've got some great people out there in the health care system delivering health care to people that need it. I could give you lots of examples, but I'm not going to. I'm sure there are others who would like to speak here in a moment, so I'm going to carry on.

We just have to look at the improvements in our education system. We're getting great results from our education system. Those results are coming about because we had the courage to go out there and talk — talk to the parents, to the teachers, to the students — and find out what it is we need to do to make education the best it can be for all our young children going through the school system.

As I said, when we came into power in 2001, we had some pretty tough financial issues we had to address. If you recall, British Columbia actually went into a have-not-province status, where we were getting money from the federal government, probably donated from Newfoundland and Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island. It's no wonder the Newfies were making fun of British Columbia years ago.

That isn't the case anymore. British Columbia, in four and a half years, has gone from being the worst province to the best. We have created roughly 275,000 jobs in four and a half years. That speaks volumes for what we did as a government to make sure that we were competitive with other jurisdictions. People wanted to invest in our province.

I'll just talk very briefly about mining. In 2001, \$29 million was spent on exploration in the entire province. Last year \$220 million was spent on exploration in our province, and \$50 million was spent on one project in the northwest part of our province, on NovaGold's Galore Creek property. They spent over \$100 million just on exploration in the northwest part of our province, looking for new mines.

I've heard it said that some of the things that we do as government aren't made public. Well, I can tell you that the mining plan out before the public today, which the mining industry is looking at, is the result of consultation we did. I travelled this province with the member for West Vancouver–Capilano and other members sitting on the other side of the House. We travelled the entire province. We visited every mine that was in this province. We went to the northwest. We visited Atlin and Eskay Creek. We went down into the Cariboo, went out to Likely. We travelled down into the Kootenays.

We spoke to the mining industry, and we asked them: "What is it that you need to attract the investment dollars back into our province?" We listened to them. We made some changes, some changes that were necessary because they were chased out of the province in the '90s. We brought them back.

We keep hearing about the commodity prices being the driving factor. There's no doubt the commodity prices were very, very important. They are very important today. But let me tell you: in 2001 for every dollar that was raised in our province, six cents of that money was actually spent on exploration in our province. The rest went abroad. Today it's more than doubled. It's up to 14 cents out of every dollar that's raised is actually spent in this province.

That would indicate to you, and it should indicate to other members, that when we travelled the province with the Mining Task Force and listened to the people, we did all the right things, because the mining industry is back in our province. We're very, very close to having a couple of new mines open up in the northwest part of our province.

Our unemployment rate was skyrocketing. People were leaving the province because there was no work here for them four and a half years ago. Today I've already told you we've created 275,000 jobs. We've got the lowest unemployment rate in the northwest part of our province, and I suspect throughout the province, that we've ever seen — the lowest unemployment rate ever.

Leadership is about having a vision and the courage to go and talk to people that are delivering programs of a similar nature, and listening and seeing if we can't incorporate some of those ideas into what we're trying to do as a government in this province.

[1710]

I would like to suggest to the members opposite that rather than leave their new Christmas toy on whine, perhaps the members who sit in opposition should change the toy's sound from a whine to that of a siren. Get in the back seat of a car with government as

we move forward to make British Columbia a better place for all of us.

**J. Brar:** I rise to respond to the throne speech, but I would like to start with a positive note.

First of all, I would like to offer my best wishes to all the members on this side of the House as well as that side of the House for this new fiscal year. I hope that all of us strive to provide the best representation to our constituents. That shows we care and that we are competent. I also hope that we represent all voices because everyone matters.

The throne speech of this government is once again a huge disappointment. The Premier offered no real solutions to the challenges facing average families. Nor does he acknowledge the damage his government has done to vital public services like child care protection, long-term care for seniors or the crisis in our forest industry.

In this throne speech the government has, in fact, recycled some of the broken promises the government made in 2001 in the document called the *New Era* document. I will talk about that a little later.

The second thing this throne speech clearly indicates is that this government has not learned any lesson from the last election and, therefore, continues its ideological pursuit of privatization of public services and resources. Therefore, the throne speech is once again reflective of the uncaring attitude and incompetent management practices of this government, rather than building the future of British Columbia on the fundamental principles of sound management and an innovative approach.

I would like to start with some of the local issues my constituents are facing at this point in time. This government now finally says that the only way to fix health care is privatization and a two-tiered system. It's blaming the system rather than its own actions during the last four years.

Let me tell you that nothing was done to Surrey Memorial during the last four years. The only thing which was done during the last four years was the promises made by the Premier during election time, including building a new hospital. In fact, no action was taken during the last four years. Now the government is telling the people of Surrey through this throne speech that our whole health care system is wrong, and we need to think about it and think about a new delivery system.

Let me tell you that we at Surrey.... The Surrey hospital has the capacity to serve 50,000 people per year, but in fact 70,000 people go to the Surrey Memorial emergency room — 30 percent more patients than Vancouver General Hospital. There are more heart patients than at Vancouver General Hospital and Royal Columbian combined. And 300 to 500 patients, as per their own report, leave the ER room each month without seeing a doctor because of the wait time. There are people in Surrey who never go to Surrey Memorial because they know they have to wait, probably, six to eight hours to get to a doctor.

Finally, the government, under pressure from the opposition, has now put together a new non-acute care emergency room. The building is there, but there are no additional doctors in that hospital. So I don't know how it's going to improve the situation when you don't have extra staff, when we know there's a shortage of doctors all over the province, particularly at Surrey Memorial Hospital.

[1715]

There were a number of reports done during the last many years. In 2001 a plan was completed which recommended a new emergency room — in 2001 — and this government took four years in the last term and did nothing. The only thing they did, as I said before, was to promise, again, to improve the situation. In 2004 functional planning was done. In 2004 another report, called the Cochrane report, came. It made 18 recommendations to improve the situation as well.

Now this year, in 2006, we see a new plan to plan, which talks about the expansion of the ER room, about building a new ambulatory care centre. It's very interesting to know.... Actually, it's painful to know that the government was saying: "Well, these recommendations are good. We agree that we need to do something. Well, at the same time, we will start the construction for the new ER room in 2007, and at the same time, we will start the ambulatory care centre construction in 2008."

The completion date goes beyond 2009, which is the next election date. The dates match more closely with the next election than with the needs of the people of Surrey, and that's a shame. In 2001 this government promised to provide the best health care system — when you need, where you need. In fact, they did nothing for the people of Surrey. I'm surprised to know that now this government wants to visit different countries. I have invited the Premier of this province many times to visit the Surrey Memorial Hospital ER. I once again invite the Premier to visit the ER and see the situation they have in that hospital.

In the same way, the promise was made to build 5,000 new long-term care beds in 2001, but in fact only 300 beds were built by this government. The people of Surrey want action right away. They have waited four years during this government, and now this government is asking them to wait for four more years. That takes, in all, eight years. That's not what the government does. That's not what we call the vision of the government. We need some actions, real actions, right now.

Let me talk about the Gateway plan, the other fancy plan we see. This idea was thrown out during the Surrey-Panorama Ridge by-election, and that's why I know quite a bit about that. At that time during the election, I demanded from this government time and again to provide a viable business plan for the Gateway project. The government failed to produce the plan at that time. The government has failed to produce that plan now.

What we see in front of us is the proposal. Well, let me be very clear. There's no doubt that we have a serious congestion problem in Surrey as well as on the

other side of the bridge, and we need to do something. We need to find a creative way to fix the problem, but this proposal which has been thrown out now does not reflect a viable business plan. It does not meet the standards of a viable business plan.

Let me tell you why it fails to meet those standards. It's very interesting to note that this government talks about business all the time. I think they need to understand what a business plan stands for. Let me tell you why it fails those standards.

First, the government has proposed charging a \$2.50 toll for each crossing. In addition, people will be required to pay ten cents per kilometre from the start to their destination.

[1720]

Let me give you one example. My wife works at BCIT, which is roughly 30 kilometres from my house. If we combine both of the \$2.50 for each crossing as well as the ten cents per kilometre, the total cost to us will be \$2,800 per year. That's a lot of money for many people. It may not be a lot of money for a few people, but it's a lot of money for an average family. That money can buy a full year of groceries for a family with four members. That money can also buy two return tickets to India and Pakistan. That's what we're talking about.

That toll, as well as the ten cents, will also impact the small business people. It will impact their ability to hire professionally trained people because it will be very hard for them to retain those people, particularly if you keep in mind the \$6 minimum training wage.

Secondly, a viable business plan needs to meet three tests before considering tolling options as a congestion control measure and revenue source.

(a) There must be a public transit alternative, and this proposal does not meet that requirement.

(b) There must be a realistic, toll-free alternative road route, and the suggested Pattullo Bridge is already over capacity. Everyone in Surrey understands — other than this government — that that bridge does not have any more capacity to add any more traffic into it. Just a few months ago, I think, four members of one family were killed in an accident on that bridge. We see that happening there on a regular basis because that bridge is already functioning over capacity. We see the Minister of Transportation saying that that is the toll-free route for people who don't want to choose the new Port Mann Bridge. This proposal fails to meet that standard as well.

(c) The revenue delivered by toll must go back into public transit, or the congestion will not be improved in the long run. This proposal is silent on that part.

Thirdly, a viable business plan includes a budget that includes various factors, including inflation, projected increase in the cost of construction and so on, to ensure that the project is financially viable. This proposal does not do that as well.

Lastly on that one, any sound business plan will identify all the risk factors and subsequently try to build a plan to address those risk factors. This plan also failed to meet that standard. I'll just give you one example. What will be the impact of this project on the

agricultural land reserve? This proposal is silent about that.

There are a number of questions that this proposal does not answer at this point in time, but the government is saying: "Okay, what we're going to do is listen to the people of British Columbia. We are going to consult with the people of British Columbia." It's very interesting, but let me tell you the history of this government when they did these kinds of things or privatized public services — what kind of consultation they did. That past history will tell us very clearly the intentions of the government.

This government eliminated the Human Rights Commission without any consultation with the people of British Columbia. That's the history of this government. This government eliminated the children's commissioner without any consultation with the people of British Columbia. This government sold B.C. Rail without any consultation with the people of British Columbia. This government closed 113 schools without any consultation with the people of British Columbia.

[1725]

This government cut services to seniors without any consultation with the people of British Columbia. This government closed hospitals without any consultation with the people of British Columbia. This government disbanded the Indo-Canadian task force, which came into existence in 2002 and was closed in 2004, without any consultation with the people of British Columbia. This government, lastly, privatized MSP information management without any consultation with the people of British Columbia, and the list goes on.

If we look at that history, then I ask a question, a general question, of the government: what do you mean by consultation with the people of British Columbia? Let me give you one example, Mr. Speaker: the government proposed a toll of \$2.50 for the new Gateway project. If the people of British Columbia, at the end of the day, say no to the toll, that means no to the bridge. Will this government listen or do the right thing — what people say? My understanding is that the toll and the money are not part of the consultation, because the government is saying we're going to go ahead. So that means that you can't talk about the toll. You can't talk about ten cents or about any major thing, but we can listen to you.

That's the past history of this government of four years about consultation, about conversations with the people, and that is what we don't want to happen. Whether it's talk about the health care system or whether it's talk about the Gateway project, the government needs to listen to the people of British Columbia. The government needs to pay attention to what the people are saying and act on that.

The same is true for education. The government offers no plan to improve the education system in the province, and that system was damaged badly during the last four years, as we all know. The tuition fee has gone up, the schools were closed and many other things were done. Class size has gone up, and this throne speech does not offer any solution to those

problems. There's no plan in this throne speech to reduce class size or to improve education outcomes. There's no commitment to improve the government relationship with the teachers of British Columbia. I think you cannot provide the best education system in the country while having a constant conflict with the teachers, because those are the people who actually make the education system the best in the country and on the earth.

Let me speak about a few things in my portfolio. Youth gang violence. This is an issue which is very close to my heart and is for many of my colleagues. The South Asian community has lost over 107 young people during the last ten years. That is an average of 45 days, one murder. This government established a task force in 2002, and that task force was suddenly disbanded by the government in 2004 without consulting anyone in the community. We still don't know why that task force, in fact, was disbanded. In my opinion, that actually allowed those gangs to grow and to establish. Finally, when there was huge pressure from the community, from various organizations working to help youth, close to the election the government came back and re-established the task force.

[1730]

That's the approach this government has had to deal with crime during the last five years, and now the situation seems to be beyond control. That's what I hear from everyone: that we can't control it — every 45 days, a murder. In Surrey alone the murder rate has doubled during the last two years. In 2004 it was 11. In 2005 it's 22. We hear from the other side that the crime rate is going down. I say: come to Surrey, and ask the people of Surrey what's happening in this province. There's no vision that we have seen from this government, no action plan from this government and no real promise in the throne speech to address this serious situation we have in the community. This is the ever-growing situation that we face.

A number of community organizations are trying their best, and they're doing the best they can. I appreciate their efforts, including VIRSA, UNITED, PICS, SAFA, the temple committee. Many other groups and committees are working day and night to help those youth the best they can in what they are trying to do, but this government has no vision — has no vision at all to address the situation. I don't know whether this is even a priority for this government to deal with the situation.

The other issue on the crime situation is the Highway of Tears. We did have a question today in question period. This is another sad situation. We were down at Prince George. We met the community. I also met with the police chief in that area, who was a very nice person. He gave me quite good information, and I had a good discussion with him about the issue. The issue is this: eight young females have gone missing since 1990 on or around Highway 16, which is now known as the Highway of Tears. This government has done nothing to improve the situation.

Again, I don't see that there's any vision from this government to address this situation. Each time somebody disappears, the family gets together and local organizations try to assist the search efforts, and they get nothing from this government. There are a number of organizations who organized a Take Back the Highway event, but they got no help from this government. That is actually the role of the government — to do that work — but they got no help from this government. There are a number of organizations organizing a Take Back the Night program in Prince George, and they got no help from this government as well. I say, again, that is the kind of work this government should be doing, but we see nothing of it.

Even the day before yesterday, we saw two police officers — these are RCMP officers — saying that there's a possibility of a serial killer in that area, particularly in three cases, but this government has never pursued that idea of a serial killer. There are people in the community saying that. Now there are two RCMP officers saying it today. The member on the other side.... They should read the newspaper just this week, and that newspaper will make it very clear. The RCMP never denied that there is a serial killer.

The community is crying for help. They need help in transportation. They need help in many other areas, but this minister has never met with those community members.

In fact, I would also like to talk about the new relationship. I've met with the Urban Aboriginal Justice Society in Prince George, and what we found was that the court workers were cut by 50 percent. These are the people who work with these wonderful young people to assist them to get back to life. Actually, there was a cut of 50 percent made, and now we talk about the new relationship with that community.

[1735]

Now the other issue which is again on the public safety side is crystal meth. I have heard a lot of statements, public member statements, from that side about how serious this situation is; what the long-term impact of that will be; how big this problem is going to be if we don't address it right away, and I appreciate that. I appreciate all those members, because they're thinking in the right direction, but the thinking has to match, at the end of the day, the actions by the government. That's where the problem is.

Let me just give you some examples from Victoria. In 2001 in Victoria, here in this city, for 11 percent of youth using the services of the Vancouver Island youth detox centre of Victoria, the Youth Empowerment Society reported that crystal meth was the main drug they used. In 2001 and 2002 the number tripled to 33 percent. In 2002-2003 it rose to 38 percent, and from 2003 to 2004 it jumped to 61 percent. In my city, in the city of Surrey, I think the school board conducted a survey. According to that, 10 percent of school kids have used crystal meth.

This is a huge problem we have in the community, but the government came up with the idea of a \$7 million announcement. They were going to address this

problem with \$7 million. Out of that \$7 million, the government put aside \$2 million for addiction services — \$2 million — whereas we said in our platform that we were going to double the funding from \$34 million to \$68 million. That is the vision to address this problem, because this problem is going to actually affect all the kids we have in the schools, one by one, and the government has been very slow.

Again, I don't see any consistent, comprehensive plan by this government to involve the local government and to involve the federal government, as well, on that issue. I also see that a few days ago the Surrey parent committee came to me, and they told me that drug pipes are being sold openly everywhere. In any store you go to, they are available. Surprisingly, in many stores where young people go, they are available. You can buy them anytime with no restrictions anywhere.

I understand that that's part of the city government's responsibility. But what's going to happen is that one city may be proactive, take action on that and ban the sale of drug pipes. Then the problem will move from one city to the next. We need a comprehensive plan for that. We need leadership for that, and this throne speech does not indicate anything to address that problem as well.

I think I have taken too much time, Mr. Speaker. The throne speech, of course, provides a clear vision of the government, but this throne speech does not address the very serious key issues this community is facing. In health care, education and particularly in public safety lots needs to be done, and this throne speech falls short on that.

**D. Jarvis:** This is approximately the 15th time that I have stood up in this House to respond to a throne speech.

**An Hon. Member:** Who's counting?

**D. Jarvis:** Since 1991 I certainly am, anyway.

Since 1991 I've seen no less than five Premiers in the province's highest office, some of whom are actually better known for how brief their spells were in that office. However, I have to say that after almost 16 years of serving the people of North Vancouver-Seymour, I have not lost my faith in this institution, this Legislature, and I thank my constituents again for the support they have given me. It is appreciated, and I will endeavour, as always, to represent them wholeheartedly, as I am responsible to my constituents.

[1740]

I still believe in the ideal that everyone who is elected to sit in this chamber comes here with the desire to serve the people of the province and to work to improve their community's way of life, to better the province as a whole and to represent them, specifically. It is our job as the people's elected provincial representatives, in my opinion, to build upon and improve this province.

It is a project without end, as we continuously build on the achievements of the generations prior to us,

improving and adding to the best of their works. This is ostensibly what the 2006 throne speech is all about. We can gauge how we have done it only by what we are able to hand down to our children and our grandchildren, and the goal should be something better than we ourselves inherited.

I am the sixth generation of a family born in British Columbia. I've always been proud of this province, but now I can honestly say that I'm really basically proud of what we are going to be leaving. You have heard me say in the previous throne speech — and budget speeches, as a matter of fact — that we actually left the people with a very substantial debt. For a whole decade the revolving-door Premiers of this province ran around with credit cards out, spending like there was no tomorrow, leaving us a legacy out of control and debts that our children and grandchildren would have to inherit.

In 2001 the present government enacted changes not only to address our indebtedness but to perform a restructuring of government agencies in order to create a better way of life for all the people in British Columbia. This government did create a plan, an actual plan, and has kept it to date.

The first four years of this government's plan were spent laying a foundation to encourage growth once again in our province. Now, after a single term of government, our economy has come back to life, and it is, as they say, firing on all cylinders. In every aspect that growth can be measured, our economy has now gone from virtually last place across this country of Canada to being among the leaders once again.

I have to give this government full credit for that phenomenal fiscal about-turn. We now lead the country in employment and job creation, and it's obvious that the vision and the resolve of this government are now starting to pay off. It was not easy getting here. There were hard decisions to be made. We all had to make changes across the board, but in doing so, we now have a budget surplus, which in turn has helped to drive this strong economy forward.

This surplus has allowed the government to invest far more than ever before in health care and education, and these pressures never change. They increase every year, and we need to be able to meet that challenge. We are just about at a point that we can ensure that B.C.'s economy will not fall backwards again or be placed in a position that sells our children's future again.

This is a government that is leading our province forward with a strong and growing economy. The government has, in the last four years, created strong employment growth and a historically low unemployment rate, resulting in above-average growth in GDP, in population and employment, and in housing starts and sales all across this province. And 275,000 new jobs were created in the last four years. That has to be impressive, no matter which side of the House you sit on.

With employers creating more and more jobs at double the national rate, B.C. employment rates lead the country. B.C.'s jobs increased 3.8 percent, compared to the national average of 1.4. Over 51,000 jobs were

created in the lower mainland alone, with 18,000 on Vancouver Island and over 15,000 in the Thompson and Okanagan areas. Hourly wages are also up an average of about 3.8 percent.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

That is real growth, the kind that puts money in people's wallets and purses. With that kind of growth, the government has found that more adults are working full-time, while part-time work is diminishing, meaning that the job market is growing as fast as the economy — or so say the top B.C. labour economists.

[1745]

The same economists, in the one instance, say it will be easy for anyone to find work if they want it. There lies another problem, a problem that no one would have dreamed possible under the last government, and that is the shortage and the need for skilled labour along with the rising cost due to the shortages of both labour and, accordingly, materials. The Business Council of British Columbia also says it will be a good year for people looking for jobs this year. "Another year of similar performance in B.C.," the quote is, or is how they put it, anyway.

There are just not enough skilled workers to fill all the jobs that this government and our economy have created for us. When was the last time we ever heard someone saying that too many jobs and too much growth was going to be a problem? Well, it's a great problem that we have right in front of us at this moment. And as a province, we have learned the hard way that raising and spending on the backs of higher taxes and borrowing on the never-never has only one result: an economy that starts to decline, which in turn forces the people of this province, people we serve, to pack up and seek work in other provinces and other countries.

As a province, our economy is growing, and we have more money to spend now on services and the future. Most important of all, I guess, people are returning to British Columbia for the first time in a long time. We need them to keep coming back to this province. The province's megaprojects are not all started or completed as yet, and we are still outpacing the supply of labour — skilled labour, I should say — and resources. We are, in part, reaping the legacy of a decade in which the skilled tradespeople and their training were not held in high enough regard. We lag behind in training of those skilled workers of tomorrow, only to find that they are the key workers that we don't have today.

This government recognized that this problem was there and could hobble the province's growth, and is making every effort to train and retrain as many skilled labourers as possible. At the same time, this government is investing millions in recruitment and training of nurses and doctors, whether they're new or foreign-trained. There is, as we know, almost a world shortage of doctors-in-training here in B.C. But that is now almost doubled, especially in the last five years. Our doc-



tors are among the highest-paid in Canada, along with our nurses, some 2,100 of which are serving patients. It's our intention to keep them, along with the doubling of post-graduates in that field. There are 6,700 nurses in training now, and we're looking for more. We've been named the top-ranking province in Canada in the health status and health outcomes, which is a testament to the service providers and health care staff.

In every aspect of the work world — professional, skilled or unskilled — we have shortages in British Columbia. This government is acutely aware that in order to keep our economy growing, we need to increase education and immigration.

I'm pleased to see this government's continued support for our resource industries. B.C.'s mining industry has endured years and years of frustration and near-collapse, but now under this government it has experienced resurgence. B.C. is leading the world in balancing minerals and jobs within its environmental sector, so we want to show the world how we can take what we need and harm nothing else.

For the last four years this government has done much to kindle new life in that industry. Today exploration and investment are up, reaching their highest levels in the last ten years. We are about to see an even larger expansion over this next decade as commodities become more and more in demand. Mineral exploration and mining sectors generate \$5 billion in annual revenue. In 2005 exploration was up from \$130 million to \$220 million, and it's still growing. It is a substantial increase in recognized growth.

[1750]

The value of mineral production was up over a billion dollars last year. The expansion will have a positive impact on all the resource-based industries that are located in the more rural and remote parts of this province.

The jobs that expansion creates are in those communities that are the rural ones. We're going to reverse the negative effect that has happened in the past ten years of economic decline. These little towns have suffered. Not to mention, because of the growth, they no longer have to see that the young people are moving away to find adequate employment elsewhere — in Alberta, etc.

In the major mining towns of British Columbia, mining companies are there to support the municipal taxes, the tax base, and provide the tax revenue that keeps these communities alive, as well as paying their rent and mortgages and putting food on the tables of some of the people that are working in that area. Mining being an industry that exports much of what it produces, it not only provides jobs but also brings money into both this province and this country — money that other countries are also spending within our borders.

The energy sector is booming across the west in Alberta and British Columbia, and as a result, costs are rising. We have to heed to these rising costs, not to impair our resource industries' operating expense so that they become non-competitive. I say that the pend-

ing demand soon for B.C. Hydro all throughout this province, and in the north especially.... For example, within these areas in the mining sector that are energy intensive, we need more energy and more power. Some mines use hundreds of thousands of dollars a month, up into the millions, to operate. There are actually two chemical plants in my riding, for example, that every day use up enough electricity to light up every home from Deep Cove up to Squamish.

We still have the second-cheapest power in Canada, and we must make every effort to retain this benefit for our commercial, industrial and domestic uses. This government must develop and maintain an ample supply of electricity for future decades for people in British Columbia.

Exports are one of the major factors that drive our economy. We not only export what we produce in this province, but we continually compete with other cities on the west coast of North America to export the whole of what North America produces.

For decades the Port of Vancouver has been in permanent competition with the likes of Seattle and Los Angeles to be the gateway of the entire Pacific region. Now, thanks to the vision of this government, we in B.C. are starting to develop a major new port in Prince Rupert that will cut entire days off sea voyages from North America to Asia, China, Japan, Korea, Australia, etc., and the list goes on. This province is establishing itself as the Pacific maritime and railway hub.

Throughout the history of our entire civilization, civilizations have been supported by the fact of good trade routes, routes that stretch from China to Europe. These were the vehicles that built many cities and nations that we now look back at in time to our earliest beginnings, so the importance of trade to any nation cannot be understated. For without good trades and good trade routes and access to those routes, no nation can actually survive, as it is the lifeblood that feeds our civilizations.

Successful trade needs robust infrastructure for sport. This is another area where this government has been delivering. The government's transportation program has made a substantial move this last month with the announcement of the Gateway project.

[1755]

This signals a major change to the future of our domestic and of our commercial transportation systems in the lower mainland and the GVRD area — a long-awaited upgrade to move the goods in and out of the Fraser and Burrard ports and bring them long-term relief to commuters and commercial vehicles. There is no question that the Gateway project of some \$3 billion is badly needed.

I applaud the government's vision. The project will also complement the government's expansion, an upgrade of the Sea to Sky Highway in preparation for the 2010 Winter Olympics. Without exception, these projects will be significant in the movement of domestic and commercial traffic and will benefit this province as a whole.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have more to say, which I'm glad that you're really interested in hearing, but noting the time and that I wish to say more at a later date, I suggest that the House be adjourned at this time.

D. Jarvis moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. B. Penner moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

**Mr. Speaker:** This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 5:56 p.m.

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