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SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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MONDAY, MAY 15, 2006

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

D. Cubberley: We're joined here in the chamber this morning by Ms. Kathy Brodsgaard, along with 25 students from Prospect Lake Elementary School, which is in the northwestern part of my constituency. Will the House please join me in making them welcome.

Point of Privilege

A. Dix: Pursuant to the standing orders, I wish to reserve my right to raise a question of privilege with respect to comments made by the Solicitor General.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements

RESILIENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

B. Simpson: Last week the Conference Board of Canada issued a statement outlining what it believes to be the top three policy challenges facing Canada. Included in these priorities is the need to address climate change. The Conference Board calls for the establishment of targets for greenhouse gas reduction and for an honest and creative conversation on climate change.

[1005]

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

This conversation is already going on throughout British Columbia, in coffee shops, homes and community meetings. Unfortunately, it has yet to be elevated to the provincial level. It is my hope that this will soon change as more and more headlines point out the implications of our changing climate and as more groups like the Conference Board call on government to take concerted action. It is my hope that the government will take a more proactive leadership role in fostering a conversation about climate change in this province.

This conversation must engage British Columbians on two fronts: first, how we can play our part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and second, what steps we must take to adapt to the changing climate. Governments have been afraid to embark on the first part of this conversation — the need to establish and set stringent emission-reduction targets. This fear is based on the false assumption that setting stringent targets would have a negative effect on our economy. This fear is unfounded, and economic panels and organizations

have been pointing this out to government for years now.

For example, in 2003 the provincial government commissioned a panel to examine the economic impacts of addressing climate change and reducing our greenhouse gas emissions. The panel told government that it was time to move forward on setting emission targets, and it recommended that government embark on a consultation process with the general public as well as stakeholder groups. The economic impact panel pointed out that it was possible to use targeted emissions reductions as an opportunity to reinvent our economy beyond our dependence on the natural resource sector. I quote directly from the paper:

British Columbia action to address climate change should not be separated from actions in pursuit of important economic, social and other environmental benefits. A strategy that propels the government along a sustainable development path can achieve these broader goals while, at the same time, reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global climate change. Such an expanded policy focus is critical to ensuring the long-term prosperity and well-being of British Columbians.

The document goes on to say that the B.C. climate change economic impact panel strongly believes that a climate change strategy "can be developed in a way that continues to grow the province's rich resource base, improves the cost-competitiveness of existing sectors and grows new industries that diversify the economy and take advantage of expanding export markets."

The idea that long-term economic benefit can be obtained by setting emissions targets and addressing the impacts of climate change was echoed again last week in the Conference Board's three-priority statement. I quote from the Conference Board directly:

The third major challenge facing Canada is to manage our natural resources for both economic success and environmental responsibility. Canada is profoundly affected by the growing international demand for natural resources.

Here is the important statement:

In this period of high demand, we have a window of opportunity to develop a natural resources strategy aimed at maximizing economic benefits while ensuring the long-term sustainability of our resources and environment.... Climate change must be a centrepiece of this strategy.

That's from the Conference Board of Canada.

Canada has declared its commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but our deeds have fallen well short of our words.

Madam Speaker, the evidence is clear: setting emissions targets can be a means to reinvent and reinvigorate our economy. It is time to engage British Columbians in a conversation about how we take advantage of climate change to stimulate the diversification of our economy. However, climate change is already impacting our province in many ways; therefore, it is important that the conversation we have with British Columbians also examines this reality.

This part of the provincial conversation about climate change must include a vulnerability analysis. British Columbians must be made aware and be able to

discuss what the impacts of climate change will mean for their community and their local economy and environment. This analysis must also be extended to a discussion of sectoral vulnerabilities: water, forestry, health, energy and tourism.

In the case of health, for example, we already are experiencing the worst allergy season that Canadians have ever experienced. That has a direct impact on our health care. The chief forester held a two-day conference on climate change in December of last year and examined forest policy in light of our changing climate. At this particular conference the presenters were unanimous in their opinion that our current forest policy was no longer valid in light of the implications of climate change on our forest ecosystems.

[1010]

Again I will quote from the findings of that conference:

The forests of British Columbia are being impacted by the dynamics of environmental change and human activity in ways that were unforeseen only a decade ago. Many of the assumptions that forest management professionals have relied upon to plan for the growing and harvesting of trees and for management of other important ecological services no longer appear valid.... Information was presented to show that one of the primary challenges to these assumptions, the trend toward a warmer climate, continues unabated and that even dramatic reductions in global carbon-dioxide emissions would not reverse the trend for several decades.

Climate change predictions for B.C. suggest strongly that for the foreseeable future, management regimes will have to adapt continuously to changes in temperature and moisture well outside the range of normal variability, and that the rate of change is faster than in the past.

The general theme that came out of this two-day conversation on forest policy was the need to manage our forests for resiliency and adaptability. This approach will demand a complete rethinking of our forest policy and practices. However, in light of the acceleration of climate change due to our past practices, managing for resiliency and adaptability can also apply to our communities, our economy, our environment and all of the sectors mentioned previously.

J. Rustad: I would like to start off by thanking the member for Cariboo North for bringing up this issue around sustainability, particularly around climate change. I think it is a discussion that is worth having in this province. In particular, one of the great goals we set out was to have some of the best environmental standards across Canada, to be recognized as a leader in those areas. I think we've gone a long way to achieving a lot of those goals, but certainly, there are things that are changing on the ground almost daily. "Daily" is perhaps a bit of a stretch, considering that when you consider climate change, you're talking about decades, centuries and millennia when you look back over the past.

I have a great bit of experience, particularly on the forestry side, in looking at climate change and forestry over long periods of time. In particular, we did a very interesting analysis on wildfire studies in looking

across at harvesting patterns and the way that we manage our forests. We found that throughout the '80s and through the first half of the '90s what we were doing in the past, quite frankly, was not sustainable in terms of the way that nature has managed our forests. So we adapted our strategies around that in the late '90s, continuing forward today. These are some of the steps towards making sure we have sustainable management of our forest industry.

I'd also like to point out a couple of interesting things about our competitive edge. In this province we have the third-lowest energy rates in North America. That gives us a huge competitive edge, and it is brought about primarily from renewable energy, from clean energy. Those are really an inheritance that our society today has that we were given by decisions that were made by governments of the past. Those are things that we want to build on and move forward.

Unfortunately, there was a lack of investment coming throughout the '90s, and we're in a situation now where we're net importers of electricity in this province. We now import about 6,700 gigawatts of electricity, primarily from the States, primarily from coal-generated and natural gas-generated power from the States. When you consider the environmental impact of that....

One of the things that we're doing in this province is moving forward with a call for independent power producers to be able to generate the energy that we need moving forward. We've made it very clear in the stipulations that we're looking for green solutions. We're looking for opportunities to generate the power, to generate the need to keep us competitive, to keep our economies going and to keep the lights on in the communities around our province through green opportunities. We've taken some great steps, and we're moving a long ways toward making sure that our economy is sustainable and that we can meet the needs of growth moving forward.

[1015]

One of the other things that I've been pleased to work on that this government is supporting is a bio-energy conference coming up in Prince George. We have the potential, I think.... To quote the president of that particular association, they believe that the central interior of B.C. can be the Saudi Arabia of the bio-energy industry.

The beauty of bioenergy is that you can use wood pellets to generate energy and, because of the carbon release that comes naturally versus the carbon release that comes through the utilization of bioenergy, it's a saw-off. It's an equivalent, which means it is a green energy.

As a matter of fact, over in Europe it's used in significant numbers in terms of Kyoto credits. So that's another huge possibility in this province, and it's one place that we have some great potential in terms of expanding our green efforts.

I'd like to also just touch — and I know I'm coming close to the end of time — on our living rivers program. We're looking at doing the best we can in our

province to make sure that we have the best water of any jurisdiction around.

These are all efforts that come from a government that understands that we need to be able to balance the needs of the environment with the needs of the people, with the needs of education, with the needs of health, with the needs of our economy and making sure that we have a long-term, sustainable growth in this province. At the end of the day, you can put the brakes on the kind of growth that we have today by doing a whole host of decisions and maybe making some rash decisions, but where would that leave our children?

We need to be able to make sure that everything is in balance, that we have the right approach. Quite frankly, through what we've done, through what we've outlined in our throne speech and in our goals, we're heading in the right direction. We're going to make sure we have a sustainable future.

B. Simpson: Thank you to the member for Prince George–Omineca for his response. The member mentioned that if the government follows what they have in their throne speech, then we're on the right path. Unfortunately, as I've mentioned many times in this Legislature, the throne speech and the budget in this session were mute on climate change.

Things are changing daily. Things are changing on the ground daily, and it's not true any longer that climate change will occur over decades and centuries. We will have that change, but the change is occurring now, and most scientists who are studying this believe that we are in an accelerated phase of climate change. The implications are now, and the actions must be taken now.

The member for Prince George–Omineca talks about our children and that we must not make rash decisions that impact our economy in order that our children will have a sustainable future. I echo that concern for our children. But without a stable environment, without dealing with the issue of climate change and the immediate concerns around climate change, then we will not have a stable and sustainable future for our children. We will not be leaving them with a lasting legacy. So I would challenge the member and members of his government to examine climate change differently.

What I was calling for, however, was a broader conversation. Green energy is one part of it certainly. As the member pointed out, there is a study. That study revolves around the Quesnel area, in fact, and says that we could put an energy plant in our community that would put 300 megawatts into the system. I look forward to the conference in Prince George, and I look forward to the government taking action on that particular proposal for Quesnel.

But it's more than energy. It is about the entire implications of climate change. It's about the vulnerability that our communities have, the vulnerability of our economy, the vulnerability of our environment to today's concerns about climate change — not decades from now, not centuries from now. Again, I believe we need to take the Conference Board's recommendations

to heart. We need to lead, from this Legislature, a provincewide conversation on the implications of climate change for British Columbians now and in the near and far distant future.

That goes beyond some nice words about goals, about what economic prosperity looks like, and goes to the reality of dealing with climate change now, taking proactive steps now and reducing our carbon emissions now.

Those aren't rash decisions. We've been warned about that since the 1970s. The answers are there. What we simply have to do is get out and engage all British Columbians in this conversation as soon as possible.

[1020]

I. Black: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

I. Black: I have in the gallery today a list of guests, including Dr. Basil Boulton, chair of the Child and Youth Health Committee for the B.C. Medical Association; Stephanie Hudson, executive director of the B.C. Pediatric Society; Allan Lamb, the executive director of the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation; Dr. Murray Fyfe, associate chief medical health officer for the Vancouver Island Health Authority; David Dunne, director of the provincial program for the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation; Stephanie Dunlop, the director, as well as an instructor and technician, for the Vancouver Island Child Seat Safety Coalition; Rickie Malhotra, a firefighter from Esquimalt; and Paul Nelson, the fire chief from Esquimalt. Would the House join me in making these guests feel most welcome, please.

Private Members' Statements

KEEPING KIDS SAFE

I. Black: The month of May marks the beginning of birthday season in my family. Of my three children, my older son turned seven on Friday, and my younger turns five next week.

Like any parent, the safety of all my children in all they do is a concern that rarely strays from conscious thought. The issue on which I rise to speak today affects my children directly and, indeed, touches every young family in British Columbia. The issue is the mandatory use of booster seats for children who have outgrown child car seats but are too small to be fully protected by seatbelts alone.

You see, standard vehicle seatbelts are designed for children taller than 4 foot 9 and more than 36 kilograms — about the size of an average eight-year-old. This means that the existing belts in cars do not properly cross a younger child's shoulders, hips and chest, leaving a child unsafe and vulnerable.

Is this really a big deal? Well, consider this. We live in a province where motor vehicle accidents are still

the leading cause of death and injury for children. Across Canada each year over 35 children between the ages of four and nine are killed on our roads, and over 350 are seriously injured. The data behind booster seats presents a compelling case for why this does not need to be the case.

The Nova Scotia government recently reported that when used correctly, proper child restraints can reduce deaths by about 90 percent and injuries by 70 percent. Further, children between the ages of four and eight in seatbelts alone have over four times the risk of head, neck and internal injuries compared with those in booster seats.

Let's add the inverse view of this data. Recent Canadian data shows that crash fatality rates for children have decreased in every age range except among five-to-nine-year-old children, the very age for booster seat use. In addition to such compelling data promoting the use of booster seats, add to the data the relative cost and ease of use of booster seats. First, standard no-frills booster seats that provide the protection described above are between \$35 and \$40. In many cars, that's about the price of a half a tank of gasoline.

Booster seats are typically made of hard, light plastic. This provides three benefits. First, you can toss a spare one in the trunk of your car and carry it in one hand — or get the child to — when transferring it from vehicle to vehicle. It also means that this low-tech and durable item can be handed down from older child to younger and, in many cases, from family to family. It means that there is no installation of the booster seat required — no concerns of slowing you down when you're in a rush to install anchors or tethers like you'd find with infant car seats.

Most children of this age routinely put on their own seatbelt, with a watchful eye and inspection from mom and dad, I hope. And there is no added difficulty or awkwardness associated with doing so while perched on a booster seat. Yet despite this, only 18 percent of children in B.C. between 18 and 36 kilograms use booster seats in motor vehicles. This is unacceptable, and I think we should do something about it.

The British Columbia Automobile Association thinks so too. In May of 2004 they launched a campaign to raise the awareness of the importance of booster seats. Not only has the BCAA focused its efforts on raising awareness and proper usage techniques, but they've recommended a series of changes to B.C.'s various booster seat legislation and regulations.

These suggested changes caught both my attention and, ultimately, my support. What they've proposed is a package of regulation and legislative revisions to increase the safety of our children. We should note that the last changes to our provincial booster seat regulation took place in 1985. Well, we've come a long way in our knowledge of safety and safety technology since then.

[1025]

The starting point for discussion is this. Current legislation states that children under the age of six and under 18 kilograms must be in booster seats or car

seats when travelling in a motor vehicle. Recall what I said a moment ago about how standard vehicle seatbelts are designed for children about the size of an average eight-year-old — that is, taller than 4 foot 9 and more than 36 kilograms.

The view logically adopted by the BCAA and many others is that in order for our children to be properly protected, it is imperative that children use booster seats until they are of the size and age when a standard vehicle safety belt can be used properly. Consistent with the data, the first change proposed moves the minimum age from six years to eight and the minimum weight from 18 to 36 kilograms.

In addition to the age and size changes being proposed, BCAA wants to extend the booster-seat legislation and regulations to apply to circumstances outside the parental motor vehicle. As it stands now, booster seats are only required for those children whose parent or guardian is the driver of the car.

We parents of young children regularly encounter the situation where, if we're driving our kids to the swimming pool, the law says they must be in a booster seat. But if the neighbour is driving them, no booster seat is required. As we unfortunately know, it is not only those vehicles which put our children at risk. Kids are at equal risk when our family members, friends and neighbours are driving and when we rent cars or ride in the car of an out-of-province acquaintance. Yet all of these are exceptions to the current law when it comes to booster-seat use.

Given the precious cargo that booster seats protect, it is time for all parents to take notice of their benefits and to listen to the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation. We cannot treat our young ones like adults when it comes to their safety, especially when booster seats are so easy to use and install within existing vehicle seatbelt systems and when their use represents such a short period of time and insignificant inconvenience relative to the significant safety benefits.

National retailers such as Zellers, Canadian Tire and the Hudson's Bay Co. all carry booster seats starting at only \$35. With booster seats being so vital to any child's safety, it is important to continue to spread this message and keep parents informed. We need to join the efforts of the BCAA, the Canadian Automobile Association, the B.C. Medical Association, the Vancouver Island safety seat coalition and parents everywhere to get this message to the public.

Do they need the help? Oh yes, in fact they do. While we all want inherently to keep our children as safe as possible at all times and in all endeavours, we face a situation where most people are unaware of the benefits that a booster seat can provide. In a telephone survey conducted by BCAA, respondents were asked if they knew at which age and weight a child can be safely restrained by a standard seatbelt. Fifty percent responded yes. But when asked to elaborate, only 6 percent answered eight years of age and 36 kilograms correctly. Only 6 percent were correct.

Further studies corroborated this finding, indicating that the most common reason for not using a

booster seat is that many parents simply fail to understand the safety benefits associated with its use.

D. Routley: Thank you to the previous speaker, the member for Port Moody-Westwood, for his remarks reminding us of the importance of bringing safety into the lives of our children.

After having attended a social-determinants-of-health conference last week, I am reminded that so often in our society we find that health equals wealth. While the mandatory use of booster seats is something that no one would argue against, it should be pointed out that for people who live on social assistance, \$35 to \$40 for a booster seat is a significant outlay to them. It is one that often deters them from making that purchase.

The member quite rightly pointed out that public knowledge of the need for booster seats in that transitional period, as the children move towards full adult belts, is not well understood throughout the population. I don't think that would be any different amongst folks who are living on income assistance.

The member also points to the need to make this requirement apply to children riding outside of the parents' vehicle. This again points to the fact that parents on social assistance need help to meet this important safety requirement, which I of course agree with. But I must again point out that it imposes a much more harsh financial burden on those who live on assistance than those who don't.

[1030]

The member also recommended that to mitigate the costs of the seats to a family, the seats might be passed down. From what I have heard, passing down seats is not a recommended practice. Seats deteriorate over time, and parts go missing. The requirements change. A booster seat of two years ago would no longer meet the requirements of today's seats. Those are important changes.

I know that when I've passed things down from myself to my sister, oftentimes the instruction booklet doesn't come along with it. Being able to use the seats, as the member has pointed out, is very important to their successful outcomes and, without instructions, can't really be achieved. Passing down the seats, I would suggest, is not a good practice and should not be recommended to parents.

Instead, I would encourage the government to find ways to help people of lower incomes reach the same levels of safety and express the same levels of concern for their children as those for whom \$35 to \$40 for a child booster seat is not an overwhelming burden. Government could make amendments and could take steps within the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance to help these families not only with booster seats but also with bicycle helmets, which are also a very strong and paramount safety concern amongst parents and children.

I would also join the previous speaker in commending the BCAA, the BCMA and ICBC for their steps to raise public awareness and bring public education to

this field. But again, I would issue a friendly challenge to those same organizations to recognize that in fact, people who are of lower income and who cannot afford that need that help just as much as those who can, and to find whatever way they can to help that happen, because they do have the tools available to them to help our kids be safe.

Finally, "Do they need the help?" was a quote I heard. Yes, they do need the help, and it's up to government to ensure that those who are vulnerable have their interests balanced amongst those who aren't. With a friendly challenge to government, let's help the kids acquire the seats they need. I'll congratulate the member in his message.

I. Black: Thank you to the previous speaker for his remarks.

With the use of booster seats, it's estimated that over a five-year period, injuries of four-to-nine-year-olds could be reduced for 130 children in this province and that many of the 25 children in this age range who are likely to die in the next five years due to car crashes could be saved if booster seats became the norm.

Twenty years ago B.C. made a firm commitment to keep every child in the province safe by enacting the original booster-seat legislation, and today I announce my intention to pursue increasing that commitment. It is my belief that we should join Quebec, Ontario, Nova Scotia and 28 U.S. jurisdictions in beginning the process of enacting legislation that has the sole purpose of keeping our kids safe on the roads and highways.

Today I will table a notice of bill that will propose changes to the booster-seat legislation. The name of the bill will be the mandatory booster-seat use amendment act. I stand here with the support and endorsement of the British Columbia Automobile Association, the B.C. Medical Association, the B.C. Pediatric Society, the BCAA Traffic Safety Foundation, the Vancouver Island Health Authority, the Vancouver Island Child Seat Safety Coalition, and representatives from police, fire, rescue and paramedics and concerned parents from all over the province.

The various details of the proposal can be broadly grouped into three changes. First, to increase the minimum age at which children no longer require the protection of a booster seat from six to eight and the minimum weight from 18 kilograms to 36 kilograms.

Second, to increase the scope of driver responsibility. Currently, booster seats must be used for children passengers who have outgrown child car seats only for those children in a vehicle whose parent or guardian is the driver. I agree with the experts here today that this protection should be extended to all children under eight, irrespective of who is driving.

Third, there are exceptions allowed under the current law for rental cars and out-of-province vehicles. I believe those exceptions should be removed.

[1035]

Tabling this notice of bill represents government joining in with safety experts from across Canada to raise awareness of how booster seats can provide cru-

cial protection for the young children between six and eight who have literally outgrown the existing legislation. Tabling this notice of bill is a first formal step to really explore this issue and to engage the public in consultation through the summer and fall to canvass and, I anticipate, solidify support for this initiative.

It is my belief that British Columbians will embrace safety regulations when the data is so compelling, when the inconvenience and costs are comparatively so minor and when our children, the precious cargo, are the direct beneficiaries.

D. Cubberley: Madam Speaker, I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

D. Cubberley: Members opposite have the advantage over me in being able to see whether there are or aren't people in the gallery behind us. I do know that Ms. Crystal Morris and 25 more students from Prospect Lake Elementary School are in the buildings this morning, and they may, in fact, be in the gallery and if not here now, will be later. Would members please join me in making them welcome.

Private Members' Statements

SAFE CARE

R. Hawes: I rise today to speak about an issue that's very near and dear to my heart. I'm going to preface my remarks by going back a little bit in history.

Years and years ago in this country we had the Juvenile Delinquents Act. It was repealed by the federal government in perhaps the late '70s or early '80s. It was an act that allowed parents to have their kids basically put into the hands of the authorities if, in the parents' judgment, the kids were incorrigible or unmanageable.

Clearly, there were problems with that. I don't know if some in this House may remember threats from their parents years ago: "You be good, or you're going to the bad boys home." Of course, I never went.

That act was repealed because it caused big division among families. There were many things about it that were not workable and, frankly, weren't healthy to families, but there was an underlying principle to it that actually was good.

The repeal of that act has left a gap, a hole through which I believe there are some children falling with the advent of crystal meth and the way that the use of crystal meth has been growing among our youth. Madam Speaker, I want you to think about what happens to young kids when they get caught up in the use of crystal meth.

What has really brought my attention to this are some forums I have attended. Many in this House have attended crystal meth forums in their own communities. At the first one I attended in my own home com-

munity, there was a mother that got up and spoke about her 14-year-old son who had become entangled with the use of crystal meth, had moved out of the house, had dropped out of school and had moved into a known cookhouse where crystal meth was being made, somewhere in the neighbourhood where this family had lived. The mother knew where the boy was, and she went to the police.

The police said: "Well, he is of the age of consent. There's nothing we can do." She went to the school authorities; she went to the Ministry of Children and Families; she went to anyone she could think of, and there was absolutely nothing that could be done to take this boy from the environment in which he was living and bring him back.

The mother could see that her boy was being lost. A lot of parents who understand what goes on with crystal meth know how deadly this drug is and how anything from the child losing his or her mind to actually dying is quite possible with this poison. That mother related a story at the forum that was for me very touching and I know for everybody that was there. In fact, there were not many dry eyes in the forum.

The mother waited outside of the house where she knew this boy was living. For days she sat outside in her car. When the boy finally came out of the house, she got out of the car and wrestled him to the ground physically, handcuffed him, dragged him home and chained him up in their home. She held him there until his mind straightened out. She didn't know what else to do.

[1040]

The boy was there with his mother at that forum. He profusely thanked his mother, saying that had she not done that, he thought he might well be dead. That mother was going through the anguish that I believe a lot of parents in this province are going through. What do you do when your child leaves and gets caught up in this horrible, horrible drug and, frankly, loses their capacity to think cognitively? It's all well and good to say we shouldn't touch the civil rights of these kids. They do have rights. It is not against the law in this country to be high on some drug. That's not against the law. So there's no law being broken. There's no law in place to be able to apprehend these kids and do something with them.

For me and for parents around the province who understand this problem, this is a tragedy. We're losing some of our youth. I know that Alberta has a safe care act, where they can pick kids up and try to do something with them. But I also know that that act hasn't proven itself to be effective. I know the minister is watching what is going on in Alberta, as I'm sure provinces across the country are. None knows yet whether this is the solution.

What I do know is the police in Alberta are happy with the act because it gives them an opportunity to pick some of the kids up off the street. But when they go into some kind of care, the question is: can you force someone who is in drug addiction to get clean when maybe they're not ready or they don't want to or...? You know, the question is: is this working? And no one

in Alberta knows yet. It's too early. So we're left with this void.

I see the light is on, and I know there's someone who's going to respond to this. I do have what I consider to be at least part of a solution. For me the solution has to lie in building partnerships. There are partnerships that don't exist yet today in this province, and perhaps it starts with the federal government recognizing this is a problem and that we can't lose our youth. The federal government needs to bring back a form of legislation that perhaps does allow some impingement on the rights of kids that are in this kind of a situation, that does recognize that a kid who's in the throes of drug addiction and living in a crystal meth world does not have the cognitive ability to think his way out of it and needs somebody to interfere with his rights for his own good and protection.

Having seen the anguish in parents' faces — and not just the one mother that spoke there but others and at other forums.... I know this is something that's being repeated across the province as these crystal meth forums are repeated in community after community after community. We are losing our kids to this horrible, horrible drug, and we're missing a tool somewhere.

Among the partnerships that I do want to speak about, and I will speak about later, will be community, etc., but I'm anxious to hear what the response is.

N. Simons: It gives me pleasure to be able to respond to the member for Maple Ridge–Mission, who made some very good points about our need to make sure that our children are safe and our youth are safe.

I would like to start, perhaps, with referencing the Juvenile Delinquents Act, 1908, which itself was based on a law called the Industrial Schools Act, which I believe was passed in 1875, to deal with what were called street urchins and wayward youth and youth who were not listening to their parents and doing what their parents wanted them to do. I think that really what we should do is try to make sure any approach we have in 2006 reflects some of the changes and some of the things we've learned since 1876 in terms of how we deal with problems in our society.

Really, the discussion around the safe care act or Secure Care Act or any act such as those, which are, essentially, a form of deprivation of liberty.... We should approach it from a perspective that isn't all right and wrong. It's not like this issue is an easy one to balance between the rights of young people and their safety and their security.

[1045]

I think what we really need to speak to when it comes to secure care is that if our society requires the use of the deprivation of liberty of young people in order to deal with a social problem, I think that in a way we can say that our society has failed at some level. Having a lot of experience in child protection, I've come across a number of young people in serious trouble not just with the law but with every authority figure and with their own families and extended fami-

lies. They're situations that we're all sorry for, but they exist.

My concern is that in those ten years of doing child protection social work, I can think, perhaps, of one young person in a similar circumstance to that which the member described, where there could have been justification for actually removing that child from the dangerous situation they were in. What I would say, at the same time, is that during that same period I must have had dozens of parents who asked me if I could please do something to keep their child off the street, out of their friend's home and what have you. We need to make sure that the balance between what the parental wishes are and what the important rights of young people are.... Essentially, what we're trying to do is integrate them more into society, and if we respond to their cries for help essentially by depriving them of their liberty, we run a risk that I think would be clear to everyone in the House.

Ultimately, should we ever resort to locking children up for their own good, we should ensure that adequate resources and a continuum of care exist in our social services system — which has been cut severely in the last five years and which may result in more young people being at higher risk and without supports in their community.

Unless we do our best as a society, as government, as legislators, to ensure that young children who we can identify very early on in life will be at high risk later on.... Unless we have programs to serve them throughout their childhoods and serve the families who are vulnerable at the same time, I think we are basically waiting till it's too late and relying on heavy-handed legislation to deal with a situation that could have been dealt with, with responsible policies earlier on to affect the child in their early childhood and during their young adolescence, prior to resorting to locking them up.

I would have concerns about how old the child would have to be. Are we going to be locking up 17-year-olds? There are a bunch of issues around secure care that I'm sure the member for Maple Ridge–Mission will expand on, but at this point I would just simply say that I do not believe that secure care or safe care is a panacea.

We should make sure that.... In Alberta we see over 300 kids locked up now, when in B.C. the discussion had always been around ten to 15 at any one time. I think we must make sure that the privacy and the rights of young people are respected and that we actually try to put our resources toward the best preventative tools available in our communities.

R. Hawes: Thank you to the member for his comments. I don't fundamentally disagree with what the previous speaker said. However, the advent of crystal meth and the use of crystal meth changes my thinking dramatically.

Crystal meth doesn't know economic barriers. It's not a drug that's used by those who are at the bottom or the top or any particular place in the socioeconomic

strata. This is a drug that can invade the life of any child in this province at any time. As we have seen in the past, the casual use of drugs like Ecstasy often will trap kids, because now many, many drugs are laced with crystal meth. This drug is a killer. Once caught in addiction to this drug, kids are unable to think cognitively.

That's my concern. My concern is less that we impinge on the freedom of kids and far more that we try to get kids out of a world that they are unable to pull themselves out of. That goes, I suppose, for adults too, but my thinking is around kids at this time. I have talked to the minister about this. The minister is watching the Alberta model.

[1050]

When I talk about partnerships, what we need is for communities, the federal government and school boards to pull together and for all of us to work together to find solutions — firstly, to make sure our kids don't ever get caught in this mess, but secondly, once they are trapped, we can't let them stay there and stand by, saying: "Well, in protection of rights across the province, generally, we should do nothing about these children who are out there hooked on this drug and getting into all kinds of different worlds of sexual exploitation and every other type of unsavoury practice to get at the drug."

Madam Speaker, we have kids at huge risk here, and there is a hole that we need to fill to protect some of them or to at least try to bring them back. I think that's our responsibility. I know the minister is, again I will say, watching the Alberta example. I know he is very cognizant of this problem. I know that he is very anxious to work with communities, as is the Health Minister. I know that we have put considerable funding towards the crystal meth problem and trying to build partnerships with communities.

These are good steps. The education step is a very good step, and I know that we will be introducing into schools across B.C. an education program so that kids will know, hopefully, that they shouldn't be trying any drugs. You are always going to be taking the chance that crystal meth could be introduced. For those that are now trapped, I think we have to sit together with our partners in the communities and at the federal level and find a way to bring those kids home.

D. Thorne: I ask for leave to make an introduction, please.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

D. Thorne: In the House today is an old friend of mine, Jean Shepard, who hails from the Tri-Cities area. Jean and I worked together 30 years ago as volunteers when we started the Port Coquitlam Area Women's Centre. Some years after that we worked together at SHARE Family and Community Services, and got paid

for our work. So it's been a long time, and I would like the House to help me welcome Jean to the Legislature.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

Private Members' Statements

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

D. Thorne: Madam Speaker, today is Child Care-giver Appreciation Day. It is a day to draw attention to the important and valuable work undertaken by child care providers and early childhood educators, who make child care work in this province. Their contribution to society through the care they provide to children is immeasurable. For this, I — and, I'm sure, the House — thank them.

Child care is provided in a variety of settings. Some parents stay at home. Others have friends and family take care of their children. Still others make use of the umbrella of services provided under the term "child care." As anyone who has tried to navigate the child care system will know, it is complex, often expensive and very full. The demand for child care spaces is so high in some areas of the province, most noticeably in the Vancouver area, that some parents face year-long wait-lists before they can register their children into day care.

Child care is very important for the economy. Sometimes this gets forgotten. It allows parents to go to work, and it's especially important right now, when we have a shortage of skilled workers and workers for the economy in British Columbia. It allows women to re-enter the workforce and to enter the workforce for the first time.

Recent statistics from Stats Canada studies show that child care is necessary for women to participate in the economy. Recent studies also show the true cost of child care. It costs about \$166,000 to raise a child from birth to age 18. The estimated cost for child care during this period is around \$54,000. This reality has finally forced a public discussion about child care in a country — and, indeed, a province — that has not, according to the OECD, developed a coherent, long-term vision for early learning and child care.

The lack of a plan for child care in British Columbia further highlights the OECD's criticisms, which are most strongly felt by early childhood educators and the very parents who operate within this disparate and under-resourced patchwork of services. The development, signing and then the rapid demise of the early learning and child care agreement initiated a provincewide discussion of child care. Child care providers and parents have articulated the need for quality, affordable and accessible care and are now looking to the government to provide this.

[1055]

However, parents and child care providers have often been met with silence and delay. In fact, they are still waiting for a child care plan to be released. I believe that an examination of the term "quality" will illustrate this province's need for a child care plan. As

we all know, quality was one of the cornerstone principles of the early learning and child care agreement signed by the previous federal government and this province. However, this province has yet to define what it means by "quality."

I believe that on the one hand, quality is linked to the outcomes of child care — what we should do to help our children grow and mature into adults. On the other hand, quality has to do with how the child care system itself operates — ensuring there are enough spaces, funds for those spaces and qualified child care providers to provide care for our children.

The Human Early Learning Partnership acknowledges the importance of child development for families, communities and society. The *B.C. Atlas of Child Development* is a most valuable tool for creating a child care system that is committed to a child's physical, social, emotional and cognitive health. What remains to be put in place, which makes this system a reality, is a plan. Parents and child care providers are still waiting for this government to articulate its own vision for child care.

Quality within the child care system hinges on trained staff, worthy wages, and affordable and accessible child care spaces. Child care providers in the province — and today is their day — are key to the development of a quality child care system. It is important for child care providers in this province to receive training.

Training opportunities span from college and university programs to workshops for early childhood educators operating in the field. Attendance at workshops and networking sessions gives child care providers the opportunity to learn new skills and to share best practices. Professional associations such as the Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia provide these opportunities, but many child care providers cannot take advantage of them because they do not have the proper funding to allow them to get help in their child care centres so that they can attend workshops.

Wages are also very important. If child care providers are not paid fair and living wages, it becomes extremely difficult to create quality child care. Ongoing research conducted by the child care resource and referral office in Victoria shows that on average, the highest-paid child care providers only make between \$12 and \$15 an hour. These are college-trained staff that are only making this wage.

Without appropriate compensation, new child care providers will not want to enter this field, or they will not see the benefit of enrolling in a training program, thus making it even more difficult to staff spaces that are already in shortage. It will be extremely difficult to recruit and retain trained child care providers. Child care educators may not be able to attend workshops or professional training sessions, and this is really quite crucial.

Finally, licensed child care spaces are needed to meet the growing demand for child care in British Columbia. Without licensed child care spaces, parents are left with few options of care for their children. The creation of licensed child care spaces means that more children can benefit from ensured standards of care.

The early learning and child care agreement would have helped to create quality child care in British Columbia. B.C. stood to gain \$633 million for the five-year child care plan. With the cancellation of the agreement, it has lost approximately \$450 million. Without this funding from the federal government, this province must increase the amount of money it spends on child care. It must reinvest money into the child care system. It must also release a plan for child care.

It is terrible that the federal....

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, member.

[1100]

K. Whittred: In response to the remarks of the member opposite, I share many of the sentiments that she raises around child care. Like her, I have been a parent raising three children and on occasion needed child care. In fact, on many occasions I needed child care. I'm now a grandparent, and I am very well acquainted with the hazards of navigating that particular aspect of our service in the community.

Like the member opposite, I rise today in support of what we're celebrating this week. We are celebrating Child Care Provider Appreciation Day today, and we certainly all pay tribute to those people who work in our child care centres, grandparents who look after grandchildren, parents who go out of their way to make sure that their children are put in healthy activities, and all of those things.

I do want, however, to point out to the member opposite that we on this side of the House are totally committed to the development of high-quality, accessible and sustainable early learning activities. We want to be sure we bring in a system that meets the needs of children and families in all parts of the province. We are, I believe, just about the only province in Canada that has a minister who is totally dedicated to that task. I certainly give credit to that minister for the work she has done.

We have worked with the federal government to bring about the early learning and child care agreement. In the last year we received \$92 million in funding and a further \$86 million for this coming year. We were the second province in Canada to be in Ottawa following the recent federal election to be sure that we continue an ongoing dialogue with the new government to ensure that the programs we have in place will continue.

The member opposite spoke a good deal about quality. You know, I was a minister of state a few years ago, and I personally was responsible for looking at the terms of the Continuing Care Act. It is under that act that child care is licensed. That was all reviewed a matter of three years ago. I think the child care people were totally involved in that review, and that act is as up to date as it probably can be at this particular time.

I thought I would take advantage of this opportunity to give an example of where we're headed in this province with child care. In my community I recently had the pleasure of cutting a ribbon at Westview School, and this is to be a child care hub. It's a wonderful example of bringing the community together. This

will be a child care and early learning centre that is attached to an elementary school. It serves a community that has a large aboriginal population and a large low-income population. It is a partnership with the city of North Vancouver and with North Shore Neighbourhood House.

It will be a place where parents meet, where parents learn about parenting, where they learn how to be even better parents. To this end, we hope we will see that kind of child care centre all over this province.

I might add that we have in this province a B.C. Council for Families, and to that end, \$300,000 has recently been given to provide materials that will help to support programs such as that.

Another program in my community that is an example of the sort of thing we're doing in child care is a program called GABA, which stands for "group applied behaviour analysis." This is a program that operates out of another elementary school — again, in partnership with North Shore Neighbourhood House and the community — and that offers training for children with autism. It is yet one more example of the kind of partnership, the kind of input that we're putting into our child care programs.

[1105]

D. Thorne: I welcome the remarks by the member from the opposite side. I'm glad to hear that this government is totally committed to child care. My only concern, or the only thing I'd like to mention today, is that I'm sure the members know what their plans for child care are. The rest of us feel as if we're in the dark — the rest of the people in British Columbia — so I would only ask that they release the child care plan pronto so that the rest of us in British Columbia know how committed this government is to child care.

At this moment I, my colleagues, parents across British Columbia and child care providers, whom we're celebrating today, do not know what plans this government has for child care, so we don't know for sure that this government is totally committed to child care. We do know that there were 40 million fewer operating dollars put into the system by this province in the last five years.

With the demise of the federal agreement, that is very scary, because we not only have fewer provincial dollars in the system; we now have far fewer federal dollars heading into the future. I would ask the minister and the ministry if they would release the plan and let us all know how committed they are, because I want to believe what I was just told by the other member.

I also thank her for bringing up the fact that today is the UN International Day of Families and that in celebration of that, we're celebrating the B.C. Council for Families, an organization in the province that I am very familiar with. In fact, I had the honour of being chosen by the B.C. Council for Families for their award for service to families for the year 1993, so I go back a long way with the B.C. council. I know the work they do, and I hope they keep it up.

I see the green light, Madam Speaker. I should finish up by saying that what has happened with the fed-

eral agreement is a calamity. I'm sure there's no disagreement on both sides of the House about that. It's a tragic event for Canada, in fact, and I hope that I can push the government to make up provincially the dollars we're losing federally so that it doesn't impact the very people we're honouring today and the children of British Columbia, who are what we're all here to support, really, in the end.

Hon. B. Penner: I call Motion 64 on the order paper.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 64 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

Motions on Notice

COMMITTEE TO EXAMINE POLITICAL DONATIONS AND CAMPAIGN SPENDING

C. James: I'm pleased to rise to speak to Motion 64 standing in my name.

[Be it resolved that this House act on the advice of the Chief Electoral Officer and address public concerns regarding the financing of political parties and third-party election campaign spending by referring the issue to the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills. Specifically, that the Select Standing Committee be empowered to:

- (a) examine and make recommendations regarding appropriate limits on, and accounting of, fundraising by, and donations to, political parties; and
- (b) examine and make recommendations on the definition of the election campaign period for the purposes of election expenses and the identification of election advertising sponsors.

In addition to the powers previously conferred upon the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform, Ethical Conduct, Standing Orders and Private Bills, the Committee be empowered:

- (a) to review all current election financing provisions and report back to the Legislature;
- (b) establish a definition of the election campaign period for the purposes of election expenses and the identification of election advertising sponsors and report back to the Legislature;
- (c) to appoint of their number, one or more subcommittees and to refer to such subcommittees any of the matters referred to the Committee;
- (d) 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;
- (e) to adjourn from place to place as may be convenient; and
- (f) to retain personnel as required to assist the Committee.]

The time has come in British Columbia — the time is far overdue — to review the financing of political parties, to examine the public interest in terms of how

we fund elections and to move to greater citizen involvement in our political process.

We have a unique opportunity to revitalize our democracy in British Columbia, to make British Columbia a leader in democratic reform and to bring our laws into line with changing expectations and demands of our citizens. One of the most important jobs we have in this House is to rebuild public faith in democracy and in the institutions of government.

[1110]

This past election showed the lowest voter turnout in British Columbia since 1928. Our citizens, as we all know, are becoming less engaged in the political process with every single election. Every day government makes decisions that affect all British Columbians, and it's important — critical — that the political process is seen as open to everyone, that all members of the public feel they have access to decision-makers, not just a select few, because when government listens to all voices, decisions reached are fair and balanced. When government is open and transparent, public faith in our system is enhanced.

In the spring session of the Legislature we have watched as this B.C. Liberal government has moved to restrict public access to information and make the business of government more secret. While other jurisdictions are talking about moves to greater openness and more accountability, here in British Columbia we have a government that in fact is moving in the opposite direction, towards greater secrecy and less openness. There's a feeling among British Columbians that the government acts in the interests of those who the governing party has been supported by financially. The politics in British Columbia is about who pays what to whom.

Recent events here in British Columbia, but also at the federal level, have only reinforced the political perception that the colour of money is far more powerful in government than the voice of the public. That's something we should all be concerned about. It's time to change that, and this isn't simply about the B.C. Liberals. It's also about my own party. The current system only contributes to the perception of a polarized province, of a province divided.

Our B.C. political culture, as we all know, has long been defined by partisan confrontation and vested interests. But those old divides no longer resonate with voters. British Columbians are ready. They want us to move forward with a different kind of politics, where all perspectives are valued, where all citizens have equal opportunity to be heard. Citizens are looking for real change in the way politics is done in our province, and part of that, a small but very important step, is taking big money out of politics and building a province where the public has confidence that money no longer buys influence in government.

The political climate in British Columbia is changing, and the government must change with it. In 1995 B.C. led the country in electoral reform by passing an election act that for its time was very progressive. B.C. had begun the process of putting citizens back at the centre of our democracy. That revision in 1995 was the first revision of the Elections Act since 1920, and I

would hope that we don't have to wait another 75 years to do the right thing.

We've seen other jurisdictions move on election financing reform. The federal government now has tough limits on how much money people can give to political parties. The federal government has banned secret contributions to political parties or candidates, and it is now against the law for a political party to accept money from corporations or unions.

The recent federal changes to campaign finance laws also follow changes made in other provinces. Both Quebec and Manitoba have banned political contributions from unions and corporations, and they've also put limits on the amount of money individuals can spend on political parties.

Here in British Columbia the government removed limits on the amount of money that special interests can pay in support of political parties. B.C. now has fixed election dates — I believe a very important reform that fundamentally changes the dynamics of elections in our province. But the government failed to reform campaign spending laws along with fixed election date changes. That now means that parties and organizers can spend unlimited amounts of money campaigning weeks ahead of the official election period without any public scrutiny.

[1115]

Madam Speaker, campaign finance reform is long overdue. Citizens agree, the League of Conservation Voters agrees and Elections B.C. agrees. Our Chief Electoral Officer recently reviewed B.C.'s campaign laws and raised important concerns about the state of electoral finance laws in our province. The Chief Electoral Officer suggested that it was time for a comprehensive review of campaign finance laws in B.C.

The motion before us today would empower a committee of the Legislature to review key provisions of election financing, as suggested by the Chief Electoral Officer. The committee will be charged with making recommendations on limits to fundraising by and donations to political parties. They would examine how campaign financing is accounted for by political parties, both before and during the election. They would consider the impact of our fixed election dates on campaign financing and how to responsibly bring public accountability to campaign advertising in the days leading up to the election period. The recommendations of the committee would then be public for all to see.

The time has come for campaign finance reform in British Columbia, reform that promotes a level playing field in favour of everyday individuals so that all citizens have equal access to decision-making, reform that begins to restore public faith and public trust in our democratic institutions. Campaign finance reform will take big money out of politics and give voters confidence that decisions reached are fair, balanced and in the best interests of British Columbians rather than a privileged few. Campaign finance reform puts citizens first and puts them at the centre of democracy where they belong.

I would urge all members of this House to support this motion and make British Columbia a leader in election campaign finance reform once again.

Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member for Prince George–Omineca.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members, please.

The member for Prince George–Omineca has the floor.

J. Rustad: I'd like to, first of all, thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for bringing up this issue of campaign reform, of democratic reform in particular. I think it's a timely issue. It's an issue that is being discussed all across Canada. For my own part, I'm involved in what's called the Crossing Boundaries National Council, and one of the recent things that we've been discussing is called citizens' centralized democracy. It's a very important discussion for everyone to have. However, it goes much, much deeper than campaign financing.

This particular motion that is being put on the floor is, in my opinion, somewhat self-serving. To put it bluntly, during the last election, almost a year ago to date, we saw the opposition party turn over the campaign to its associates — to the BCTF, to the B.C. Federation of Labour, to many of the union groups. They organized and ran parallel campaigns, which were not....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members, could I get some quiet in the House. The Chair is having trouble listening to the speaker. Thank you.

J. Rustad: The opposition let these groups, quite frankly, run their campaign. They turned over their campaign to these groups in terms of running, of trying to garner support, of running advertising. They ran huge campaigns, and now what we see is the opposition leader saying, "Yes, we need to stand up. We need to reform democracy," because she wants to turn over her campaigning to third parties. She wants, also, to restrict us, who want to run our traditional campaigning the way that democracy has been run and has been set up to run for many years.

[1120]

Quite frankly, the Leader of the Opposition is also advocating for what the federal government is, which is turning the burden of campaign financing on to the people of this province, as opposed to making it a choice of democracy, to making it mandatory. It's what I also find very interesting. The evidence speaks, Madam Speaker. When you read through the motion, there isn't a word about third-party advertising. There isn't a word about third-party involvement in campaign financing, and it speaks to the very root of why this member has brought forward this motion.

I understand that there are many members that would like to speak to this here today. In my opinion, this motion that's come forward is politically motivated. It is an attempt to wrestle away the political decision of the people of this province, the political participation opportunities of the people of this province and turn them over to select groups that run third-party campaigning.

The member did mention one thing I found very interesting, which is that this past election the voter turnout was the lowest since 1988. Voter turnout in this province — and, indeed, all across most of the western world and, for that matter, most of the democratic world — is dropping at alarming rates, particularly in the youth, particularly in the younger categories. The older generations seem to be participating at a much higher level, but every generation that has come along is voting at a lower participation level. We do need to do things to reform that, to turn around.

We've taken a number of steps as the B.C. Liberal government of this province in terms of reforming the democratic process. In particular, the fixed election date was a huge plus. We took away the ability of any government to use setting a campaign date for their own political advantage and made it fair for all parties and for the whole side. That's a huge step towards making the election process fair and forthright.

Going back to the position on the low voter turnout. We do need to consider some methodology to try to create a higher level of participation in democracy. We have one of the most open and transparent governments in the country. We have made that....

Interjections.

J. Rustad: To the opposition's denial of that fact: it is far more open and transparent than anything they had done during the '90s.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

J. Rustad: I do believe that if we are going to make some serious motions around some electoral campaigning and electoral reform, it should be exactly targeted on that particular issue. How is it that we are going to increase voter participation? How is it that we're going to take away special interest groups' influence on the political process to make it a broader and more acceptable process for all the people of this province?

I look forward to debating those real issues, as opposed to what, in my opinion, has come forward as a very partisan motion designed specifically for the type of campaigning that the opposition put forward in 2005 and would like to continue with.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members.

L. Krog: Notwithstanding that this chamber, I think, since my leader arrived here last year has become a more civilized place, it is still somewhat like an elementary school, and so today I'm happy to follow my leader.

The reason that I suggest it may be an elementary school is because of the interesting remarks from the member for Prince George–Omineca, who I think to some extent didn't do his homework and read the motion that clearly. Now, I don't see anything in this motion that excludes the obligation of the Select Standing Committee on Parliamentary Reform and Private Bills to review the issue of third-party financing and all those special interest groups that we know make a difference in electoral politics in British Columbia.

[1125]

What this motion does is bring forward before the voters what has become a central question of modern politics. It is clear that we have done something different in the northern half of the North American continent. As we look to our neighbours to the south and we see the enormous power of big money that it plays in elections, when mere Congressmen have to raise millions and millions of dollars to retain a congressional seat, when candidates for the presidential nomination of the respective political parties raise tens and tens of millions of dollars in order to pursue that nomination, surely we in Canada can look to that example and say: "That's not the way we want to go."

I am today so very proud of my leader for bringing forward this motion in this House, which carries on the commitment that this party made in the last election to bring in campaign finance reform if it became government.

I would have thought the terms of this motion would have drawn from the government benches overwhelming support and gratitude for bringing this forward before the House so that the unanimity we enjoyed around the Premier's speech the other week respecting the Kelowna accord would likewise have been reflected in the comments of the government benches today — that this is a motion that deserves the support of every member of this House.

I've said it before, and I'll say it again. It's what George Schultz said at the Iran-Contra hearings. He said that trust is the coin of the realm. Right now, low voter turnout — and the numbers that we saw recently from the Chief Electoral Officer of which parties receive what from what organizations in this province in order to finance their political campaigns — should surely be enough evidence for all of us that it is time to move forward with true election finance reform, which is exactly what this motion is calling on all of us to do.

Moreover, it's not like tossing it to a royal commission to hide a politically difficult matter. It is referring it to a committee of the members of this House, who have been duly elected to responsibly look after the interests of all British Columbians, to give that committee an opportunity to go out amongst British Columbians to hear their views and to come up with recommendations that are appropriate, so that in British Columbia we can once again say we are back on the

leading edge of electoral reform instead of following behind other provinces that have already taken these steps — such as Manitoba a number of years ago.

The federal government, for heaven's sake, which became so identified with political corruption, managed to bring in campaign finance reform. I'm astonished that the members in the government benches this morning wouldn't wish to support the responsible, sensible and appropriate motion before this House today. I encourage them to change their minds. I encourage them to go back into their caucus and talk to their leader. Let's do the right thing in British Columbia.

B. Lekstrom: I would like to thank the Leader of the Official Opposition for bringing this motion forward today.

[Applause.]

Well, thank you. I'm not sure you'll respond with a clap for this, but I just want to state that I do see this motion, obviously, differently than the Leader of the Opposition and her colleagues on that side of the House.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members, please.

B. Lekstrom: I think one of the most important changes we've seen take place in British Columbia is the issue of fixed election dates, which was brought in by our government — something that I think is certainly worthy. Regardless of what political party you're with, I think it makes some sense. That way, two years into a term, if things are going well, all of a sudden an election isn't called and away you go to the polls and the people aren't ready; or four years in, things aren't going well and so you stretch it out for an extra year to the fifth year. It just wouldn't make sense and doesn't make sense, and we made that change.

The issue of spending in pre-writ periods is something that I think is a democratic right. Whether you're a labour organization, a business or an individual, you're putting your views out there. You're letting people know where you stand. I don't have a problem with that. But what we're talking about really...

In the motion it deals with the writ period as well, defining the writ period. Is it 28 days? Should it be 15? Some of us probably wish it would be a week, because 28 days is a long time during a campaign period. But the issue there is equality, really. We have equality right now during our writ period, and I'll focus on that portion of it.

[1130]

Our funding is allotted based on a formula within the act right now that treats every candidate, regardless of political party, the same — based on your population, based on where you're at. That formula lays out what a candidate can spend within the writ period, so we're all equal — whether you're with the Green Party, the New Democratic Party, the B.C. Liberals or any of the other numerous parties we have in British Colum-

bia today. The issue for that is equality, and for me, that equality is there. I think it's sound, and I think it's a good principle.

The other issue we talk about during the pre-writ, as we refer to it, is government spending. I mean, we hear a lot about it: "The government is advertising." I'll say something here today that I've believed from the time I started studying politics. I think it's a responsibility of whichever government is in power to spend money on advertising or information sessions to inform the public that they represent. It doesn't matter if it's the B.C. Liberals, the New Democrats or the Socreds. It just doesn't matter. The people should have that coming to them.

Whether it's an address by the Premier once or twice a year or information put out through newspapers, television or community bulletins, I think it's the responsibility of government to inform the public. Each and every one of us does the best we can as an elected official of this Legislative Assembly to do that.

The low voter turnout is probably the most important issue that I have dealt with and thought about. How do we improve it? To be honest, it is a struggle. Each and every one of us in this chamber, I'm sure, struggles with that. There has to be more than just responsibility for government here. I think individuals have to take some responsibility as well. They abdicate that social responsibility when they fail to go to the polls, in my eyes. People fought and died for our right to live in a free and democratic society. Nothing offends me more — nothing — than when someone can't find time in their day to go to the polls and throw their ballot behind the candidate that they choose.

I'm not going to carry on. I know there are a number of speakers here. But we hear a lot about: "We want to get big money out of politics." Well, Madam Speaker, I'm going to tell you this. If there's a single member in this chamber — previously, today or in the future — who is going to base the support that they bring to the floor of this Legislative Assembly for any individual, business, labour organization or whoever on the amount of money that they contribute to a political party or a political campaign in their constituency, that person shouldn't be on this floor of the Legislative Assembly.

We talk about the responsibility of individual British Columbians. There are many out there who are very politically involved but don't have enough money to say: "I want to give you \$50; I want to give you \$5," or "I want to give you \$5,000." But you know what? Their heart is there for the right reason.

When we talk about politics, it's healthy to have differences. We don't live in a society with just one view. That's why we have an official opposition. That's why we have a government. That's why we have numerous other parties out there putting their views forward. At the end of the day, the people go to the ballot box on election day and put their X for who they want. It's tabulated, and we form a government. That doesn't mean the opposition can't bring ideas forward, because as we see, each and every day you do.

I think what people want more than anything is that members of this Legislative Assembly act respectfully to each other as colleagues. We see that; we have made some progress. I give credit for that, because people watch television at question period, and they look at that. I'm sure all of us have shaken our heads at one time or another during that or during debates at second reading or committee stage. We don't want, I don't imagine, a boardroom to operate the way we sometimes see in here, but we've made that correction. It has operated in a way that I didn't agree with for many years. It's still going to take, obviously, a number of years to get to the point that I see inside my mind as to how it should be working, but we are going in the right direction.

I guess the question is what people are looking for here. I don't believe it's going to come through legislative change. I think it's going to come from each and every one of us. It's going to come from you and me and from colleagues here previously and ones in the future. They're looking for people to bring respect to this chamber, to bring good dialogue, to do their homework when they speak on an issue and to carry that forward. Each and every one of us will make this province a better place.

[1135]

M. Karagianis: It's a great honour to stand today and speak in support of Motion 64. The previous speaker made mention of fixed election dates. I will say that I actually congratulate the members of the other side for fixed election dates. I think that is one part of what this motion is about. In fact, this motion works in conjunction with that to make a whole package for the citizens of British Columbia.

Public faith in politicians is at the lowest possible ebb. I think all of us know that. The public is skeptical about honesty and integrity in their politicians. That's all of us. This is no longer the honourable role, as a representative of the public, that it once was.

Yet I know we are all honest and hard-working human beings with great integrity, and we all have a commitment to the public that we serve. But our ethics have been put into question — some of that by recent activities over the last few of years, but generally by a growing distrust of politicians by the public. If we are going to restore public trust in the system, in politics, in democracy, then we are going to have to change the ties — real or perceived — that politicians have with their donors.

In response to the member for Prince George-Omineca, let me just read the stats from the last election from Elections B.C. — donations made to both parties. The New Democrats' total was \$7.5 million; 69 percent of that came from individuals and 30 percent from unions. The B.C. Liberals brought in twice that at \$13 million, 77 percent of which was from corporations and only 20 percent from individuals. So is it any wonder that the public looks at these statistics and says: "Is big business able to get access to government in a different way than the individuals who contribute?"

Young people are the least likely to vote. We all know that. It's an issue that we've grappled with at every level of government, and we continue to have conversations about how we motivate and get young people to participate in the system. In fact, part of the reason they don't participate in the system is the skepticism of what politicians are all about, how we operate and who has access to us. And you know what? The democratic system will dwindle with our generation if we do not find a way to make politics more relevant for young people.

Young people see the direct connections between political donations and actions of government. In fact, the American style of politics occurring here in Canada more and more, where lobbyists and donors to government have access to the laws that are made and the changes that are made, is becoming more and more evident every day. Young people know that.

Gomery needs to be a wake-up call for all of us and, in fact, should be a huge lesson for all of us that the public clearly understands — follow the money, and you will see how the policies are made and who makes them.

I think it's really important for all of us — for ourselves, for our own representation and for our own perceptions of our representation — to be free from those ties of donations as well. We need to be able to move forward as politicians and behave in this House without any real or perceived debts owed to our donors — whether they're corporations or whether they're unions — other than individuals who put us here as their representatives, individual citizens putting us here as their representatives. Until we can step clearly away from that, then we're not free to operate here as well, because we're always defending ourselves. We're always defending our actions here in this House as somehow being a mirror of unions or corporations, and I think both sides of the House suffer that equally.

For those businesses and union representatives out there, we also need to set clearly for them some perspective on their influence to us. If big business thinks they can buy influence, then they will continue to do so. We see this all over the world, and we've seen this happening in Canada more and more. We've seen it happen in this province — the perception here around what corporate influence can buy in government. I think we need to actually set those limits, as well, for those donors and say: "You cannot buy influence. Here is a clear message to you that you are not going to be able to influence policies, laws, agricultural land releases or any other lobbying effort here in this province by simply contributing to the party."

[1140]

A really important aspect of this motion that's brought forward is around third-party financing. That is a key part of the wording here. Each and every part of the clauses within Motion 64 is very important to try and sever those ties for both sides of this issue — be it the donors or the politicians.

You know, across the world politicians and citizens continue to grapple with how to get fair, open and transparent accountability and how to get citizens to

participate in democracy to make it work for them. We're not alone in that. This is one key initiative here in this province that actually could now help us join the movement that is occurring across this country and across the world to make government more relevant and to make us more relevant as representatives.

I applaud this motion, and I would urge all members of the House to support this motion. For all of us, this is about being honourable members. This is one aspect of it — to sever our ties, real or perceived.... Often it's the perception more than the reality of who has bought this influence, but for all of us, this is an important move.

This is actually a perfect addendum to fixed election dates and will help to motivate a new generation of voters out there to trust us once again as their representatives. Thank you very much for this motion.

M. Polak: It's true that many people have discussed the low voter turnout that seems to plague our western democracies. However, I want to bring a piece of good news to the House at the beginning of my talk here. You'll be happy to know that in the riding of North Vancouver-Seymour in this last election, there was a 78-percent voter turnout — in spite of which, they still elected my colleague who sits on the floor with me.

Well, we have before us a motion that proves that once again we have an opposition in search of a position — whether it's Gateway or MLA compensation or, now, election finance. The idea is that we ought to study everything further, wait till someone else makes nice-nice around a committee table, and then we'll make a decision.

The fact of the matter is that there is nothing wrong or intrinsically evil about a partisan discussion. It is one of the valued parts of our Westminster democracy. I grew up in a home where my parents used to love to read famous historical and political figures and debate the issues around the dinner table. One of the things my father hammered home to me is that there's nothing to apologize for in saying that you have a particular position.

It would be much more useful to have an opposition who brought forward a firm position, saying, "Here are the actions, the amendments, the precise ways in which we would like to address election financing reform," or whatever other reforms in the Election Act they'd seek to find. Then we could have a direct debate and discussion about those things.

But you know, it takes a certain amount of courage to get out there and take a strong position rather than simply back off and say: "Oh, we shouldn't be partisan. Oh, we shouldn't bring our ideologies here. Oh, we shouldn't have this open discussion in a firm way."

The reality is: we're elected to do that. There's nothing wrong with that. I think part of the reason people get jaded about politicians and the role they play is that politicians get up and say: "Well, I'm not bringing any ideology to this. I'm not bringing any position to this. You know, I just want to discuss it." The public knows that's fundamentally untrue, and they expect more from us than that.

I want to talk a bit about the goals that, hopefully, we're seeking to get to here. Generally, if I'm to hear the proposer of the motion correctly, those would be to instil a greater confidence in our political process and also to, hopefully, encourage a greater involvement in the political process.

I want to talk first of all about the issues of confidence that have been raised and suggest that we ought to pull our heads back from what's happening in the United States. In fact, one of the disservices we do to our public is that we speak on many occasions as though what we're operating in here is very similar to the United States. I've visited legislatures in the United States, and you're talking about an entirely different world — a world where people sit in their office, which is their desk on the floor of their Legislature, and lobbyists come and hang around with them on the floor while they are voting and discussing motions. It's a very different world, and we ought not to give any credibility to that.

[1145]

We're not dealing with the wild west here in British Columbia in terms of election financing. My goodness, the amount of work it takes — and all the members know this — to file your appropriate forms and explanations for your expenses and donations over an election period.... My goodness, they're detailed, and I think that's a good thing.

In fact, the member for Esquimalt-Metchosin illustrates my point exactly, which is the reason she can rhyme off all those numbers about who gave what to whom — because they're out there. They're public. The public can find them, know, make decisions about who supports whom and whether or not they appreciate that or take anything from that.

Certainly, if there's any suggestion that there's something inappropriate about the decisions that the opposition makes or that government makes.... If there's a suggestion that that's because we're counting the dollars somebody gave, then that suggestion ought to be just put out there full force. Don't just hint around the bush. If you're going to make an allegation, make it.

The fact of the matter is that I don't think that happens to anybody around here, but we're not in the wild west. We have some strict accounting rules, and everything is open there for the public to see.

With respect to involvement, one of the other things my father is fond of saying is that people get the government they deserve. Under our system of government, there is a really good reason why we ought to respect when people don't vote. I don't mean we shouldn't work to improve it, but you need to respect it. One of the principles involved is that you do not cast a ballot because you're giving assent to the process, that your silence is taken as consent. That's a very important principle in the form of democracy that we have.

I'd love to see people more involved, but one of the big reasons they aren't is because we don't get out there and talk about ways in which they can be involved. That means urging people to take two hours a year out

of their life and join a riding association in the party of their choice, help to select candidates. Those opportunities are there. They're there for people to pick up, and I believe they will, as we become ambassadors for a democratic process rather than spouting off rhetoric about what everybody watches on CNN or sees on an Al Gore presentation on *Saturday Night Live*. We have to be realistic with people, and we have to talk to them about their responsibilities.

I want to talk a bit about what I think was a rather irresponsible way of debating this point in this House. Certainly, we try to have respectful debate, although sometimes it can be robust. To suggest that it is the colour of money that colours our thinking and guides the decisions we make is, I think, really inappropriate.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I would have wished it hadn't been raised here, but since it has, I want to tell you about the way in which an MLA — and any of us, I'm sure — decides what kinds of things we do as a representative for our communities. It happened very shortly after I was elected — this example.

I got a phone call at about seven in the morning that a building in our community that was operating under Langley Family Services, one of the largest family-serving agencies in Langley, was burning to the ground. I got in my car, and I drove down there. There were a number of people there from the community who had seen what was happening, and we became aware very quickly that this community organization was going to need some emergency funding if they were going to continue serving people in the area.

I got on the phone. Other people got on the phone. I talked to ministers, I talked to staff, and I advocated for us to be able to find some way in which we could help this organization. We were able to do that.

I didn't do that because they gave me one red cent during my campaign. I didn't do that because I was motivated to think: oh my goodness, I'd better do this because, gosh, somebody might give me some fat donation. I would have to say that I don't happen to believe, as the Leader of the Opposition seems to, that there's anybody in this House who sits back and says: "Hmm, I'm weighing this decision. Well, this person gave me \$2,000, and that person gave me \$5,000. Oh, I'd better make my decision based on that." That suggestion is just completely inappropriate.

The reality is that we all come here because we want to serve the public. We come here to do a job that doesn't particularly give us the fast-flying lifestyle. It gives us the lifestyle of serving others and knowing that we can put our head on the pillow at night. We've done some good. If we come home from here and know that we've done some good and changed somebody's reality for the better, then we've done our job well. Let's keep doing that.

B. Ralston: I rise in this House to support the motion. Let's keep in mind that this is a recommendation

from an independent officer of the Legislature, contained in a report to pursue something that he has suggested — in the ambit of his independence — is an important public issue.

[1150]

First, I want to begin my remarks by responding briefly to the member for Langley, who just spoke and suggested that the opposition had no firm position on campaign finance. In fact, that is simply not true. The opposition introduced a bill in the Leader of the Opposition's name in the last session. Those members opposite failed to support it, and it died. It's not a question of not having a firm position. We on this side have a very firm position on aspects of campaign financing. The members opposite failed to support it.

Secondly, the member for Prince George-Omineca again attempts to divert attention and fails to engage with the real issues that are brought forward in this motion. This, again, is a recommendation from the Chief Electoral Officer. The questions about third-party financing, advertising, sponsorship — all those kinds of issues — are contained within this motion and are perfectly open to the parliamentary committee, if it were to be struck by this motion, to address.

What I want to address here is the suggestion that somehow.... The member for Prince George-Omineca, the first government member, the lead speaker in responding to this motion, has said that somehow this motion is political. In fact, the issue of campaign finance reform, particularly at the federal level, is now embraced by all parties.

Let's look at changes to donation provisions in the federal Elections Act. In 2003 Prime Minister Chrétien introduced public financing and limited corporate and union donations to \$1,000 per entity, per year. That bill was not changed by Prime Minister Martin. Indeed, now Prime Minister Harper has come in and introduced a bill which would further change corporate and union donations to prohibit, to ban entirely, corporate and union donations. Of course, those positions have been supported at each step by the federal New Democratic Party.

At the federal level there is virtual unanimity — and I leave the Bloc Québécois aside, but my understanding is that they, too, support campaign finance reform — so to suggest somehow that this is some partisan political motion that's brought for a narrow political purpose is simply wrong.

It's responding to what the public is asking for in terms of campaign finance reform. Indeed, astute political leaders at the federal level, from all parties, have responded in legislation. To suggest somehow that this is some aberrant motion is simply nonsensical and shows an unwillingness to engage with the real purpose of this motion. It's unfortunate that we can't have an open and engaged debate here in the Legislature on this particular issue.

At the provincial level — again, the spirit of non-partisan support for these kinds of provisions. Quebec in 1978 instituted a ban on union and corporate donations. Manitoba in 2001 instituted a ban on union and corporate donations. This committee, if it were to be struck, would take forward....

Now, definitely my party has a position. We've introduced that bill, but we're willing to go out to the public and find out whether the public agrees with that, unlike the view of consultation from the other side — particularly the Minister of Transportation, for example — which is to take a firm, immovable position and then consult. And never mind what the public says in the process of consultation. Stick with your firm, immovable position.

That's not the way to run a democracy, and that's not what people are looking for. We are prepared to go out, at the recommendation of the Chief Electoral Officer, and look at the various provisions of the Election Act, and it's high time that this took place. The motion is comprehensive, in the sense of reviewing all current election financing provisions in the act. Perhaps an aspect of that discussion will be a measure of public financing of elections. I don't know whether the public in British Columbia is prepared to accept that. Certainly on this side of the House, we'd be prepared to consider that.

Redefine and look at the election campaign period. There's an issue about when expenditure is counted as part of the limit and when it's not, and all members would be familiar with that process. Again, look at that part of the legislation and come back with recommendations. Have a comprehensive public discussion, and go throughout the province in a parliamentary committee, where there's a record made of it and people can come forward and have their input.

[1155]

That's why I'm proud to stand in this House and support the motion of my leader and to set out and engage in an open public process on this important public issue that enjoys broad public support at the federal level, which I'm sure will gain broad public support at the provincial level if the members opposite would just stand up in their places and support this motion.

Mr. Speaker, noting the hour, I move adjournment of the debate.

B. Ralston moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. B. Penner moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until two o'clock this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 11:56 a.m.

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