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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
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Morning Sitting  
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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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Her Honour the Honourable Iona V. Campagnolo, CM, OBC

**SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT**

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MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2006

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

Prayers.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Statements

##### POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY TO MUNICIPAL VOTERS

**H. Bloy:** Politics in a country such as ours is all about accountability. In a democracy it is the people who, quite rightly, hold all of us accountable for our actions and decisions. If the electorate likes our policies and approves of our performance, they tend to be favourable during their period of judgment at election time. If the voters are unhappy and feel that they've been ill-served, the consequences for a politician are normally not too favourable.

A few weeks ago the Minister of Transportation announced something that, in my mind, is long overdue. That was a review of the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority or TransLink's governance structure. First of all, this review is independent, and we do not know the recommendations that will result from the three-member panel's conclusion. But I can tell you that the results will be highly anticipated.

I do not wish to jump to any conclusion here. I am not criticizing TransLink. I feel that TransLink is an important service for all of the residents in the GVRD in the lower mainland. TransLink is not being reviewed. It is the way they are governed that is being reviewed.

I am pleased to hear that the panel will hear submissions and input from the public. I've already been to one of these meetings, held in my riding of Burrquiltam. This three-member panel will also look at past recommendations on TransLink governance made by the Auditor General in 2001 and by the Greater Vancouver regional district board in 2005.

[1005]

While it appears that most people are supportive of this decision to review TransLink, there are those who are not. Some of them are currently serving on TransLink's board, and the panel's conclusion could have the potential to usurp their authority.

I have an issue with these detractors advocating for the status quo without first listening to any suggestions about how TransLink's governance structure could potentially be improved and reviewed. It is a little bit absurd in a way. It is important to the public that a governance review take place. They have the right to know if TransLink has been administered in the best possible manner. After all, it's the taxpayers who are the major investor.

I would encourage the detractors to put aside any partisan beliefs they may have and to work with everyone in the interests of TransLink. We all have the

same goal: to make TransLink a more effective and efficient body that provides outstanding service to its customers, the citizens of the GVRD. Their views are questionable, and I know I'm not the only one who believes this.

I would expect senior and seasoned municipal politicians to embrace any initiative that could potentially make TransLink a better-run organization. Not only would this benefit the TransLink board but also, more importantly, the public.

TransLink is not a personal fiefdom for municipal politicians who serve on that board. It makes decisions that affect every person in every business in the GVRD. This review will take this into account when recommendations are made on the appropriate division of roles and responsibilities between TransLink, the GVRD and the B.C. government over transportation-related issues, including revenue-raising measures. In addition, this panel can put forth proposals concerning the composition, size and appointment process for the TransLink board. This should be welcomed by all, not criticized.

Everyone in this Legislature is accountable to our constituents. They wield the ultimate power over our political futures. We need to respect this and ensure that concerns are listened to at both the provincial and the municipal levels. That is why it is necessary to make sure our constituents are receiving the best possible value for their hard-earned tax dollars.

I would like to end my opening remarks by reading a quote from a contemporary politician from Britain. His name is Tony Benn. I am sure some people here have heard of him. He is a well-known Labour Party politician and firebrand.

What is interesting about Tony Benn is that he spearheaded a campaign to end the hereditary peerage in Britain's House of Lords, despite the entry guaranteed due to his inherited title. He felt that automatic entry to this grand institution, with considerable powers that have considerable impact on the daily lives of Britons, was wrong. He advocated that you had to earn your way into the House of Lords, not be born into its Red Chamber.

During a lecture entitled "The Independent Mind" that he made in 1993 in Nottingham — which is the home of William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, and of D.H. Lawrence — Benn said the following words: "What power do you have; where did you get it; in whose interests do you exercise it; to whom are you accountable; and, how can we get rid of you?"

These words should ring true in each and every one of us. We have been placed in a position of importance by our constituents. We all had to earn our way into this office. This is something that makes British Columbia and Canada leading democratic lights.

[1010]

**N. Macdonald:** It's a pleasure to stand and respond to the comments on, I guess, what is essentially around reorganization for TransLink. I'll make the following point. First, to compare the House of Lords to TransLink, I think, is a real stretch. The House of Lords

— people get there in a manner that I think the member for Burquitlam quite accurately described as coming in through hereditary peerages. To say that's in any way similar to TransLink is completely inaccurate. The people that are on TransLink are people that have gained the support of their communities through elections and have been chosen by their councils to sit on that board.

My background is in local government. I think for many people in the Legislature it is the same background that they have. I served as a councillor, I served as a mayor, and I think it is the most accountable level of government. It is the place where, especially in a smaller community, you make decisions, and then you go out, and you meet the people that your decisions impact. You hear pretty quickly whether you have got it right or you have made a mistake. With local government in bigger centres, I have the same level of respect for that level of government. These are people that are directly accountable to the communities they represent.

Now, TransLink may not be a perfect model of governance. I have never served in TransLink. I do not live in a community that is impacted by the decisions they make. But what I would say is that it is a governance system that is democratically based. I think that where we run into mistakes and where this government makes mistakes is to think that governance models should be technocratic — that they need to be boards of experts that are moved away from people, regular people, who have been chosen democratically. I think that is a mistake.

One of the criticisms I would level most seriously against this government is around the organization of health care and around the Interior Health and the fact that it depends upon a system that is not democratically accountable, that it has a board system made up of people that are appointed and that there is no public accountability. With TransLink, one of the concerns I would have is that you would be tempted to set up a similar structure.

The member says: "Who would be afraid of some looking at a governance model and perhaps making changes?" I would say that nobody should be afraid of that. The concern would be that there is a predetermined conclusion about TransLink, and that certainly is the conclusion that I would reach. I think there is already a plan in the minister's mind around how he is going to organize TransLink. That's where the concern lies.

If there is going to be genuine consultation and there are going to be principles based around democratic accountability, if those are going to be the key premises that you look at in how TransLink is reorganized, then it might be something that people should not fear. But that's the concern I raise, that you would set up a structure that's technocratic rather than democratic and controlled by local government. That's what I feel is an absolute priority: that you have local accountability and that it is based on a democratic structure. If you move away from that, I would say that you are

running into problems — problems that we have seen in other areas with this government.

I thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on this. I turn it back to the member for Burquitlam.

**H. Bloy:** I would like to thank the member for Columbia River–Revelstoke for his comments, but I do disagree with him. I believe this will be an open and public accountability process to see how the governance of TransLink will work in the lower mainland. We need more than just criticism; we need positive suggestions. We need people to work with this process to make TransLink work.

I was hoping the member for Burnaby North might have responded, because I want to know where he stands on the Gateway project. Where does that member stand? Is he in support of it? Where does he stand on the widening of the Trans-Canada Highway running through the centre of Burnaby? Is he against the new intersection that's going to be put in at Wayburne to move traffic?

Where is the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville? Are they against the improvement at the King Edward intersection that will lower the freeway and put a bridge over top of the freeway? Where do people stand on these initiatives that are moving forward — the Mary Hill bypass?

The public wants to know where people stand. This process is about standing up and saying what you believe in, being up front about it on what you are for and supporting it when there is something good.

[1015]

Or are you just generally against everything? That's the feeling that I get, when I read the local newspaper quote after quote after quote. I find it really disturbing. I think it's a continuation of some members who are just totally against things — or elect the politicians that they can't look at something new.

Being an elected official is about government. The people truly want to know where we stand. So if we disagree, or if we agree, we should be able to stand up and do it. When we disagree, we should be able to work with the people that are there to try and find the best way — than just saying: "I don't like that; I don't like that." We do everything for the electorate.

So I do support this governance review. I believe that it is extremely important that we're always reviewing the institutions. We have to make sure the public is getting the best possible value for the dollars invested in what they do.

We should never be afraid of change. Change will always happen, and it can't be: "Well, I want the new but don't change the old." You can't do that. You have to be brave enough and stand enough and strong enough. At the municipal governance level, they have to be able to stand up and look at what they're doing to be able to review the process, and when they've outgrown that process, it's time to move on to a new way of doing business. I believe strongly in the Minister of Transportation's proposal for governance review.



## COMMUNITY OUTREACH

**C. Trevena:** I rise today to talk about helping people, helping those most in need in the community. We've heard about the Vancouver homeless outreach project from members opposite, from the Minister for Employment and Income Assistance occasionally, who boasts of its success, and just last week from the member for Vancouver-Burrard.

It's one of those small-scale projects which can work, which can creep under the radar and which can also fall through the cracks. It started last October quietly, and most definitely quietly. In fact, when I and staff tried to find out what it was about, we couldn't find anyone in the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance who knew about it. Since then we have heard of its successes: 90 people in selected parts of Vancouver who were living on the streets, now housed, now receiving assistance. But I find it puzzling nonetheless.

I was at the Carnegie Centre in the downtown east side last week, and I was told that this project is a good move. While it does mean diverting that organization's limited number of hard workers in outreach, it does get some people off the streets. Two days a week two outreach workers from Carnegie arrive early. They wake people up — people who've been sleeping on the streets — they take them to the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance offices where staff have come in early to get them registered so they can get some assistance. Then they get help finding a room, usually in a rooming house. As one worker told me: "We can help people jump through the hoops. If Carnegie workers are there, there aren't so many hoops to jump through."

This is all well and good. It's great that people are getting off the street into, hopefully, safe, clean accommodation. "People usually just sleep for three days after we've got them off the streets," one worker told me. But what is puzzling is how little time is committed to this. It runs just two mornings a week and helps two people a day.

I'm not belittling this. With the horrors of homelessness, every bit of assistance helps. About 40 people in the downtown east side have been helped since January 1. But if this is such a success, I wonder why there is not more money and more time for it. Assisting people at this rate is not going to make a dent in the thousands who are homeless and who are without assistance, while it does help some individuals.

However, when the minister talks about it, it's as though hundreds of those thousands will be assisted, and I quote him from last November: "The last city-run homeless count in Vancouver identified more than 1,200 people without shelter. While an estimated 70 percent of these may be eligible for income assistance, many of them are not applying, and that is a problem. So if they're not coming to us, we're looking at bringing services to them."

Bringing the services of the ministry to the people would be wonderful. Instead, two people a day are

taken to the ministry office to help them jump through the hoops. This is one of the problems. Access to the system, to income assistance or disability benefits is not easy. If they didn't have someone helping them — helping them with identification, with the forms, with the system itself — they wouldn't be able to navigate it and to receive welfare.

[1020]

There is something terribly wrong when to get assistance, which is something to which anyone should be entitled if they find themselves in poverty, you need an advocate.

It's not just the homeless on the streets of Vancouver who need guidance through the system. Many people applying for assistance only get their entitlement if they have someone working with them. This is true for people who have low levels of literacy, who cannot deal with the forms. It is true for people who cannot work through telephone trees. It's true for the disabled.

For awhile one of the great goals of this government was to make life better for the disabled. To receive assistance you have to complete a 23-page form and hope that your doctor uses the correct key words. People have been turned down time and again for benefits until they have an advocate helping them through — though it is hard to find an advocate these days, with cuts to women's centres, to legal aid and the like. There are still a few there, many self-taught, many learning through experience, but nothing like the numbers needed for the people in need.

But going back to the streets of Vancouver, where Project HOPE helps people get off the streets into a place where they can stay with some assistance, and the project helps people maintain that shelter too.... It's been broadcast as a success, yet funding for it runs out in a couple of days, at the end of the fiscal year. The Minister of Employment and Income Assistance thinks it's a good project, but it doesn't seem to be a line in this year's budget — well, not that it was in last year's, either. This is a ministry where the workers' hands are often tied, where somebody who goes for an emergency needs grant is sent to a soup kitchen. The worker likely doesn't want to do that, but those emergency grants clearly aren't for any old emergency.

This project on Vancouver's streets is a way to help people. It's a good start for some of the most desperate people, but we need to do more than this band-aid. Picking people off the streets, giving them food, shelter, some cash is a band-aid for an individual when the system is falling apart.

If there is not something wrong with the way we're doing things, why would homelessness be on the rise? The number of homeless in greater Vancouver has doubled in the past three years, and 75 percent of the 2,000-plus homeless are not receiving assistance. They have been frozen out of their entitlement because they've not got the right documents or, more worryingly, because they've not been able to prove that they've been independent for two years.

Those who manage to get on assistance get a pittance. For a single person, it's \$185 in support and \$325 in housing. When asked why the rate for shelter won't be increased, the minister claims it's because unscrupulous landlords would raise the rents. I think one of the things missing in this equation is that the rents are mostly well over \$325 everywhere. The wait-lists for social housing are soaring, and no social housing is being built. You can't get very far without a home, without food, without clean clothes.

So while helping people in Vancouver is important — helping people in any community is vital — we have to do more. We have to do more than just reach out to people on our streets. We have to invest in our system and reweave our social safety net.

**G. Hogg:** Thank you to the member for North Island for those comments. In terms of looking at us, our need to do more.... I think societally that's very true, that our connectedness with one another is often the best part of being human, and sometimes the institutional models that we have for service delivery tend not to allow that connectedness to take place.

It is networks of relationships that weave individuals and groups into a sense of community. Certainly John McKnight, who I think is one of the seminal thinkers worldwide in the issues of community and in models of service delivery, has said very clearly that as we look at service delivery models, rather than looking at trying to reinforce the institutional models of service delivery that we have seen in North America and western Europe for years, we have to look at other ways of providing service delivery. I think the challenges that the member for North Island put forward in terms of doing that is an important challenge.

How do we look at service delivery models that do reflect the sense of community in a more active way? We know that over the past 50 years there has been a dramatic difference in what community is. We know that a number of sociologists say that you measure community, or the engagement people have in community, by their participation in workplace organizations, by their participation in faith-based organizations and by their participation in political activities, whether they vote or belong to organizations.

[1025]

Certainly, we've seen a decline over the past 50 years in the participation in all of those at an equal amount. People are less engaged in their communities today than they were. We know that people are spending one-third fewer or having people over for dinner.... Our communities are much less than what they were 50 years ago. Our need for showing caring and support for each other means that governments, I think, have to facilitate the ability for local groups, organizations and communities to have the capacity to respond to, look at and deal with the needs of community within their sense of small groups.

There are some organizations that are doing that. I think that some of the experience, particularly in Italy, in some of the ways they've looked at being able to

respond more effectively and empowering people.... Instead of having a system where we make people in need become the recipients or the consumers of services, we have to engage them in being part of the decision-making part of that process.

[S. Hawkins in the chair.]

Some of the Italian models of co-op service delivery are very positive ways for us to look at some of the models that we have, where you actually have people who have need of services, who maybe have a short-term need or a longer-term need because of a particular handicap, being able to be engaged as part of a co-op where they actually are a participant in a decision-making process and a partner in the service delivery model. They get to vote on the model. They may have to make decisions on the model. The research out of Italy suggests that there is something like 60 percent fewer complaints. People feel much more in control of the service delivery model. So it's an associational model rather than a consumer model. We allow people to feel as though they are a part of decision-making, a part of what's in their best interests, and the model allows that to happen.

In British Columbia we have in the PLAN model, dealing particularly with those with developmental handicaps. They've made great strides in starting to do that. There clearly is a recognition in all of the western democracies that the role of the state as this paternalistic or maternalistic service delivery provider model is the wrong model. It's a model that's not going to be able to provide and has not provided well for people for years and years.

If we look at a new model of service delivery that actually engages people in that type of challenge.... I think that we should probably be engaged in a process that looks at how we can more actively and appropriately respond to the needs of people, rather than just looking at the structures of service delivery that we have today and saying: "How can we make those better? How can we reinforce the institutional models of service delivery that we have?"

I think it is time for us to look more broadly at the service delivery models and look at it in a collective sense — look at the experiences of Italy and the models that they've done; look at some of the experiences that organizations like PLAN have put in place. McKnight says that we spend a lot of time looking at our social service delivery models and saying: "Look at the problems that we have. There are too many people who are unemployed. There are too many people who are on some type of income assistance. There's too much crime." He says that because we do serve that kind of model, we never look at all the assets that exist in the community.

You finish looking at that and say, "Well, nice community," but we actually have lots of strengths in the community. The only communities that have really grown and shown success in terms of service delivery are those which have built upon the strengths that exist

within communities today. We have lots of people across British Columbia who have enormous strengths and enormous abilities and are prepared to make enormous contributions. We need to engage them in a meaningful dialogue to allow us to look at a service delivery model that's not just based on the hierarchical institutional models that existed in the past but is involved in engaging communities in ways that make sense for service delivery, where they can feel part of it rather than feeling a consumer of it.

**C. Trevena:** I thank the member for Surrey-White Rock for his very thoughtful response to my statement.

I agree we have to look at models. We have to look at the systems that we have, because the system we have, as I mentioned, clearly isn't working. We have too many people falling through the cracks. However we look at it, whether we look at it from the statistics of people who are homeless, people who are unemployed, people below the poverty line or, more generally, from the system — what is the system doing to help them? — either way, we're failing people.

I think this is what we have to address as we're going into the 21st century. The systems and the structures that we have inherited from the post-Second World War development of social aid and of assistance for people may not be working for us anymore. I think that we have to address this. We have to work together. We have to work with communities, with people from — as the term goes — the grassroots. We have to work with the people who are the recipients, as well as the people who are theorists and the designers, to find out what people do need and what will help them.

[1030]

But underlying this, there is the very real fact that our system isn't working and that we are reaching a crisis. So I would urge all members in the House to be prepared to start addressing these questions, to start looking at how we can best act to help our own communities. The strength of everyone here is that we come from a community. Whether it's a political community or a church community or a village community, our communities are what make us strong and what unite us.

But we can't rely on these communities, these networks, to help people get through the crisis, to deal with the issues of homelessness. That's why we have a responsibility, as legislators, to take these issues on and to address them with the thoughtfulness and seriousness they deserve as we take this century on. As we go into the 21st century, we really do need to be able to address these problems.

Again, I thank the member for Surrey-White Rock for his very thoughtful response. I hope that he and other members from the government benches will be able to work with us in looking at possible models and working with other groups, because I believe this does go beyond party lines. I think it is something we have to look at that will create the framework for assistance and for supports as we move through this century. I thank the member very much.

## EARLY CHILDHOOD LEARNING

**R. Cantelon:** I rise today to make comments about early childhood learning and its importance. As a new MLA I was struck by the fact that one in four children is not ready for school. This is really a comment, as much as anything, about our society.

What does it say about our society? It's not just that far too many of our children are not ready for school. It is certainly, of course, not the child's fault that they don't understand what's expected of them. Nor can we too quickly assign blame to the parents or, as is more often the case, to the single parent or, as is again more often the case, to a single mother.

Parents are the first teachers of our children, and it's clear that many parents are themselves not prepared for this responsibility. In many cases this causes a cycle of despair and hopelessness where the unhappiness and the unhappy situation of the parent are then visited on the child. The child does not get a fair start to school or in life in general, for that matter. Many studies have shown that a child who begins with a poor start in school has societal difficulties all their lives, and so the cycle begins and is self-perpetuating.

This poor start involves more than just early childhood learning issues, of course. It usually involves emotional and health issues as well. Clyde Hertzman, in his work on early childhood development, has put forward the concept of HELP, an acronym that means human early learning partnerships, which involves public health, early intervention, support for child care and support for the family.

Anthropology has taught us that the early tribes raised the children. In today's modern society too many people become isolated and are left on their own to raise a child — or children, often — without support or assistance from the community. The pressures of low income all too typically fall upon the shoulders of these single parents to make this problem even worse.

Early success in school can make a big difference. Governments can help, and indeed, it is a priority of this government and this budget to support the well-being of vulnerable children. However, I'm not going to speak here of the budget initiatives but discuss how communities can become engaged and respond to government programs and how often they can inspire us with imaginative and independent initiatives.

The Central Island Independent School Society recognized the need in Lantzville for daycare. It was about more than just daycare though. They, too, recognize the value and importance of early childhood learning. In planning their new facility, they discovered that there was no facility in Lantzville to provide daycare with a learning environment. They took advantage of the federal-provincial program to build such facilities and will be building a brand-new facility to accommodate up to 50 children in the area.

Bill Robinson, on his own in Nanaimo, has partnered with school district 68 and the Nanaimo Clippers hockey team with a concept called Hidden Heroes. This brilliant program focuses on the greatness of sim-

ple, positive acts that make a difference in people's lives. The heroes are hidden. They are everyday acts of everyday people doing good things from the generosity of the human spirit to help others with no expectation of reward or recognition. That is why they are hidden and often go unnoticed in our busy and self-centred lives.

[1035]

Young students are encouraged to find people that make a difference and find out why. They learn about positive values, character and commitment, and in doing so, learn about themselves. A grade one student saw herself as a hidden hero because every time she and her mom visit auntie, she takes care of baby cousin so that the adults can visit. Two grade 12 students chose to eat lunch every day for a week with a student who was isolated and emotionally bullied. Some of their friends became his friend, and the isolation and bullying ended.

School district 69 has embraced the concept of community involvement in a universal program for the community. They call it Building Learning Together. BLT gives it an appetizing and familiar acronym. This wonderful program was the brainchild of Deborah Davenport. The concept is to enhance children's development by supporting strong family relationships and community capacity through effective learning opportunities. The learning opportunities include 18 preschool literary initiatives to deliver a strong commitment towards early learning intervention and prevention.

The opportunity includes Words on Wheels, 13 Mother Goose and Friends sites, Outreach Bus, Hug-a-Book and many others including the latest, Munchkin Land. All of these are as creative as they sound and are very successful in capturing the imagination and interest of young children and are designed to hook these youngsters on reading and learning. And it works.

The community involvement is what really makes it happen. Over 100 businesses and community organizations, including the RCMP and Canada Post, are committed supporters. One of the biggest is the Grand-Buddies. Over 200 seniors are involved as buddies to help with everything from driving; to outreach; to reading to painting, sawing and hammering facilities. This is real community leadership, and their success is a model for other communities. I invite you to look at their website, [www.sd69.bc.ca](http://www.sd69.bc.ca).

BLT demonstrates that communities need to become involved, if we are to make a real difference, by breaking the cycle that begins with early childhood learning. My point is that governments can support and supply funding, but it takes the individual leadership that I have talked about here today to re-create in a modern setting what in ancient times came naturally to a tribal society. I hope all members of the House will be inspired to encourage such leadership in your communities.

**D. Thorne:** I thank the member opposite for raising such an important topic this morning, and I couldn't agree more that communities' involvement is abso-

lutely essential for any of the programs that government oversees or funds or whatever.

I think that we have in most of our communities, and I'm sure in school district 69 as well, community tables that are meeting around different age groups. We have the early childhood community tables, we have the six-to-12 and we have youth tables as well. A number of community agencies are involved in those in every community. I myself sat at the community table for the tri-cities for a number of years as the municipal representative for the GVRD, and I can speak firsthand about the kinds of success that we have had.

I also have sat for a while at the United Way's Success by 6 partnership table. I know that that's a program that has been funded through the United Way and the provincial government. Again, it's many community agencies coming together to make sure that we take the best kind of program and get it out to the communities. I know that school districts and health departments are always involved with those community tables.

In preparation today for responding to the early learning issue, I took the opportunity to go back over Jane Morley's report. Actually, I read it more thoroughly than I'd had a chance to do when it came out a few months ago. I think that she really sums up a lot of the things that.... I have many pieces of paper here, and I could make myself crazy trying to find information, but I think that a lot of the things Ms. Morley says would be things that I would agree with and that the member opposite would also agree with.

I'm just going to read. She gives ten pieces of advice to us as the government and as the people that are more or less responsible for this area and for making sure that the communities are involved. Her first piece of advice is to take a long-term view. Certainly, I think everybody would agree with that.

[1040]

I know I only have five minutes, so I'm not going to.... I would advise everybody to have a look at this. It is section four in Morley's report, *Healthy Early Childhood Development in British Columbia*.

(2) Articulate a British Columbia early childhood development plan in the context of the fundamental human rights of children.

(3) See the plan as a "whole government" plan and commit to its implementation at the Premier and the cabinet level.

(4) Designate and support the Ministry of Children and Family Development as the lead ministry to implement the plan.

I believe that's a very important one.

(5) Provincially, expect linkages, collaborative planning and action at the regional level with the aboriginal and non-aboriginal authorities, health authorities and school boards.

This is referring exactly to what the member was referring to.

(6) Work in partnership with aboriginal communities to integrate the province's child development plan with an aboriginal plan developed by aboriginal communities, and take a leadership role in making federal and provin-

cial funding criteria and processes consistent with the aboriginal plan.

Here we go with the community tables.

(7) Allocate funding envelopes, with appropriate and supportive accountability mechanisms, to community tables throughout the province for community-based planning and delivery of early childhood development service.

And, of course, that includes early learning, child care, etc.

(8) Provide child care funding in a way that demonstrably supports quality and choice.

(9) Invest strategically in specialized services for children with health and developmental challenges.

And the last but not least:

(10) Put in place an evaluation and public accountability framework.

I think that if we as government were to follow those ten recommendations from Ms. Morley, we would be way ahead of the game.

Do I have any time left? I have a little bit.

I wanted to talk about research and brain research and early childhood learning and just to back up what the member has said, that "the first six years of life are an important period in the development of a child and a matter of public policy significance, yet in Canada our collective commitment to early childhood development has lagged behind that of most industrialized nations.

**R. Cantelon:** In responding, I'd first like to thank the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville for her comments. I think we're probably on the same page and the same wavelength here. It isn't that this government certainly hasn't done a lot, and that's why our budget commits to.... We call it the budget of the children here, with \$421 million committed to improving and expanding services for children.

But the real key here is not just about money. It would be a horribly tragic irony if we were to run deficits simply to add to the debt of the children we're trying to help. So the first step is to continue, as we've done, to run a fiscally prudent and responsible balanced budget and work within that. But also, in responding to the member opposite, we need to do it in a way that responds to the community. The community has to be involved; the community has to take initiative.

We have to be very diverse, as many of the programs that this government — and previous governments, I would acknowledge — have initiated to respond to genuine community initiatives and needs. We need to break this cycle. If we're to achieve our goals, certainly as we put forward as a golden decade, we need to inspire and to break the cycle of poverty and hopelessness that too many people are involved with.

It is really a comment when we know and we say that one in five children is not ready for school that what we're really saying and recognizing is that one family unit in four is not with whatever we consider to be our society's program. With whatever we consider to be success in our society and as a contributing unit of our society, one in four ain't with the program, and

that has to change. One of the most effective ways to change it is to engage with early childhood learning to break that cycle.

As the previous speaker from White Rock had mentioned, one of the challenges of all governments now, today, is to develop models of service delivery. The classic top-down, institutional, one-size-fits-all does not work. There are community differences, ranging from cultural to resource-based economies that create different working and parental groups and cultures within the regional areas, to immigration with a wide range of cultural background differences. The government needs to be flexible in producing programs that respond to all these in a diverse way.

[1045]

But the most exciting ones, as I've mentioned today and the speaker opposite has mentioned today, are those that truly start with community roots and that can rise from the community itself to respond to these needs. If we are to achieve greatness in our society, it has to begin, and it has to begin in a very diverse and coordinated yet expansive way in assisting children to get a really good start in school.

We've done many small things, such as the startup program for \$4 million so that young children can go to school with their heads held high, with some dignity. We need to do much more.

#### HIGHWAY OF TEARS

**J. Brar:** I rise to make a statement with regard to an important public safety issue along Highway 16. The 720-kilometre stretch of highway between Prince Rupert and Prince George in the northern interior of British Columbia has come to be known as the highway of tears after a number of aboriginal women and girls were assaulted, murdered or went missing in a community on or near the highway since 1990. Aielah Saric-Auger, a 14-year-old native girl, is the latest victim. Her body was found on February 10, 2006.

The actual number of women assaulted, murdered or gone missing is not clear. As per the RCMP, the number of those missing women is just eight as of today, but according to the Native Women's Association of Canada, the actual number is much higher. The association claims to have the names of 32 women from reserves and communities in the area. Therefore, it's hard to say what the exact number is.

Similar questions with regard to the actual number of missing women were raised by the representatives of various organizations in Prince George. The situation certainly demands some answers from the government. Why is it not possible to prepare an accurate list of missing women with accurate numbers? That's the question the community is asking. That's the question I heard from various representatives in Prince George.

Melissa Munn, a criminology instructor at Northwest Community College in Terrace points out: "We have a real distrust by many of the aboriginal community of the formal justice system, so in many cases they

don't even bother to report it." Similar comments were made with regard to the lack of trust toward the justice system by the representatives of various organizations I met with in Prince George.

It's very disappointing that this government did not even make any effort to develop and subsequently provide an accurate list of all the missing women to the affected communities around the highway of tears. Therefore, my question is: if the government is unable to provide an accurate list, how can it give assurance to the aboriginal community that the government is committed to finding the missing women and solving the court cases, which is much more complicated and difficult work?

Is there anything the government has done to offer those communities other than the ongoing investigation by RCMP regarding the registered cases? The answer is: nothing has been done. There's no doubt that this government has failed to live up to the minimum expectations of the aboriginal community around Highway 16.

I appreciate the communities around the highway of tears for the extraordinary efforts they have made to address this serious public safety issue. The local organizations have come up with a number of initiatives with the purpose to educate the local community. A website called *Highway of Tears* has been developed by a businessman based in Prince George. This website provides comprehensive information on all the missing women and on programs that are available in the community.

The local organizations have developed a program called Take Back the Highway. Every year both native and non-native people march along the highway in each community to draw attention to the missing women. A similar program called Take Back the Night is organized in Prince George by the community organizations to raise awareness about this issue as well.

A two-day symposium involving a number of aboriginal organizations is also taking place in Prince George this week on March 30 to 31. The Lheidli T'enneh Nation has organized the symposium and has committed to work with any organization that is determined to put an end to these horrific murders.

[1050]

Their invitation points out: "As aboriginal people, we may be able to pressure the system into dealing with these crimes in a speedy and professional manner. But as aboriginal people, the only thing we can directly impact is the way in which we deal with our youth and each other."

It further states: "It is time aboriginal organizations work together and create a symposium in which all nations upon the highway of tears, and all people who are most vulnerable to such a crime, come together and find a solution."

Once again, I appreciate all the work done by the aboriginal organizations without any support from the government. They are committed to finding a way but have very limited resources and support available from this government, which has failed to provide the required resources to assist the aboriginal community in finding a workable solution to this challenge.

This government has failed to provide leadership and develop a workable plan to educate and empower aboriginal youth, who are vulnerable to becoming victims of these crimes around the highway of tears. This government has failed to initiate discussion with the aboriginal organizations on this issue as well.

The community is getting together this weekend to discuss this serious issue and to work toward finding solutions. It is time that the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General makes this a priority by committing support and resources for implementing meaningful recommendations made at this symposium. It is also time to develop a plan to win back the trust of the aboriginal community in our justice system.

**D. MacKay:** I would like to thank the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge for bringing to this floor an important issue for everybody that lives along the Highway 16 corridor or the 97 corridor throughout the central interior part of our province. I just want to take him back to a couple of comments where he mentioned the failure of our government to take the necessary steps to address this rather serious problem.

I would like to tell the member that this is like déjà vu for me. I can recall that when I was in the RCMP in the late '60s and throughout the '70s, we were experiencing a very similar problem, more specifically along the Highway 97 corridor, where young people were going missing. Hitchhikers were going missing and not being found. When they were found, tragically, it was bodies that were found and not the young people who had been hitchhiking.

On a personal note, a young lady that used to be a babysitter for my children when they were growing up was actually a victim. She was hitchhiking back to Lac la Hache, a community south of Williams Lake, and she never made it to her destination. She was found several months later in a shallow grave alongside the highway. So I wanted to take exception to this failure of our government to address the problem, because this problem is not new.

It is a tragic story, but all the fault does not fall back to government. It's easy to pass blame in hindsight, but what's happening along the Highway 16 corridor.... I live in Smithers, and west of Smithers, there is a small native village called Moricetown. Almost every day, if I'm driving in the evening, there are young hitchhikers going back to Moricetown — usually young aboriginal people. It's young women and young men.

Tragically, it's the young women that are going missing all the time. It's not the young men. The men seem to make it home safely, but it's the young women who tragically go missing, and that has created this problem we have today. Part of the problem is the remoteness, where these native reserves are located. They're not located near the larger centres, where the activities are taking place that the young native people want to get involved in. After-hours, the only way home for them, because there is no public transit, is to hitchhike.

If I had to say anything to those young people who continue to hitchhike, knowing full well that hitchhiking is a very dangerous thing to be doing, it is: if you are going to hitchhike, if you are a young native lady or any young woman who has to hitchhike to get home after-hours, I would encourage young women to please get together and hitchhike home with somebody else. If you must hitchhike, if there are two of you, chances are that you are going to get home safely.

That's one thing I would like to encourage them to do. If they know when they are going to be leaving a particular part of town and if they are going to be hitchhiking home, I would encourage those people to please phone ahead and say: "I'm hitchhiking, and I expect to be home at a given hour." If they don't show up, at least somebody can start looking for them immediately.

[1055]

Invariably, what happens is that these young women go missing. It's not just young native women that are going missing. We have young Nicole Hoar, who went missing out of Prince George. She was a tree-planter; she was hitchhiking from Prince George to Smithers. That's a couple of years ago, and she still hasn't been found.

If you're going to get into a car, you shouldn't get into a car with a stranger. But there is a word of caution there, because we don't know who is doing this. We don't know who is taking these young women and causing them to disappear, never to be seen again. If you're going to get into a car, don't get into a car with a stranger. A word of caution there: perhaps it's not strangers that are taking these young women's lives, causing them to disappear and never be found again.

Science is moving forward and helping police officers and the coroner's office as they investigate deaths when these bodies are discovered, but the evidence that is left after the victim is found is usually very small. There is very little to work with. I was a coroner in Smithers when we recovered one of the young native women who had gone missing from Moricetown. I have to say there was not a lot of physical evidence for police to work with — very little evidence for police to work with. We don't know what time she was picked up. We don't know where she was picked up. We just know that she was hitchhiking home from Smithers to Moricetown and that she disappeared. The type of car that picked her up — we don't know. We don't know what time she was expected to be home.

It's not as if the police aren't investigating. We've actually got 35 RCMP officers investigating the missing women along the Highway 16 corridor today.

**J. Brar:** I appreciate the comments made by the member opposite. First of all, I would like to say that, given the member has the experience working with the RCMP, I have no concerns when it comes to the investigation done by the RCMP. But let us not forget that the RCMP has a role which involves, basically, three stages: investigation, arrest and prosecution.

I don't have any objection when it comes to that stage and that work being done by the RCMP. I'm

proud of the work the RCMP is doing. The only question I would have, when it comes to the RCMP, is whether they have the available and appropriate resources to conduct the investigation they have on their hands, particularly when we talk about nine investigations going on.

I was speaking to one of the senior police officers just a few days ago, and I learned that one cold case may cost over a million dollars to dig into the information. I don't know whether they have the resources to go on full-blown investigations for all those cases. My question was more on the other side when I talk about the government failure to address this issue. I agree with the member again — that maybe more than 50 percent of the women have gone missing when they were hitchhiking on the highway. But at the same time, we need to do something to educate the community around Highway 16 so that they understand the danger of hitchhiking.

At this point in time the communities are working on that. The communities are doing some excellent work in that area, but we as the government — this government — have failed to support those programs which are already going on in the community. That's where I say the government has failed. At the same time, I understand that every individual in this province, including the people living around Highway 16, has the individual responsibility. But let's not forget, by saying that, that the government also has responsibility to provide safety to the people of British Columbia.

That's where, again, I have the question. We now have an opportunity where, finally, the communities are getting together this weekend, and I hope they will come up with some excellent recommendations to deal with this issue, particularly when we talk about the education and empowering of youth in those communities.

[1100]

This government has an excellent opportunity to work with those communities closely and provide the resources, help and leadership so that we can implement the recommendations which come out of this symposium.

**J. Yap:** I ask for leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

### Introductions by Members

**J. Yap:** Last week I made a two-minute statement regarding the wonderful things happening at Charles E. London Secondary School in my riding. This morning I'm delighted to welcome a group of 66 grade 11 students who are here as part of the social studies course to learn about democracy in action here in our provincial parliament.

We have teachers Sandy Thorneycroft, Megan Brady and Buneet Bains here accompanying 66 grade

11 students. Would the House please extend a warm welcome to these students.

**H. Bloy:** I just wanted to make a correction in my private member's motion this morning. When I was referring to the member, I referred to Burnaby North. I was referring that I wanted a response and to know where the member for Burnaby-Edmonds stood.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I call private members' motions, Motion 57.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 57 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

### Motions on Notice

#### MANDATORY RETIREMENT

**K. Whittred:** Today, by introducing this motion, I am encouraging the government to introduce legislation to end the practice of mandatory retirement in British Columbia.

[Be it resolved that this House encourages the government to end the practice of mandatory retirement.]

This motion acknowledges what is intuitive, I think, in each of us — that skill, ability, motivation and vision do not stop when one turns 65. People who are 65 and older should enjoy the same right to contribute to society and earn a living as those who are younger. To retire or not to retire is a matter of personal choice. Every person should have that choice of which road they follow in their life's work, whether they are self-employed, work for a large company or work for the public service.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

Hon. Speaker, 65 is just a number. People are not like a quart of milk. There is no best-before date. Someone does not become disposable because the calendar flips.

We were reminded just the other day that our own esteemed Clerk has passed his 65th birthday. Winston Churchill was past 65 when he became Prime Minister to lead the free world through a world war. John A. Macdonald was 76 when he was last elected Prime Minister. In our province, Jimmy Pattison, Jack Poole and many others continue to lead the province in their respective fields.

So why 65? Where did the number 65 come from? Well, that is a bit of a mystery. There is, in fact, no legislation. There is no law that says there is mandatory retirement. There is, however, a century of custom and tradition.

Conventional wisdom tells us that it began with Otto von Bismarck in the 1880s, when he introduced

the first comprehensive old age insurance benefits. However, what is really interesting is that in Bismarck's program, the retirement age was 70. The first old age programs in Canada, introduced in the 1920s, also had an eligibility age of 70, and 70 continued to be the age until the 1960s, when the Canada Pension Plan was introduced, and 65 was chosen as the age of eligibility.

It's further interesting to note that when the age of 70 was chosen in the early 20th century, life expectancy was somewhere between 60 and 65. Today life expectancy is around 80 years. In a society where we live longer and healthier lives, the whole concept of mandatory retirement is out of step. It is an anachronism.

[1105]

A recent survey by HSBC showed that there is massive support for the right to work until any age one chooses. A StatsCan report indicated much the same — that many Canadians want, in fact, to retire before the age of 65, but that many also want the right to work longer if they choose. The research also shows that while ending mandatory retirement gives people options, it does not negatively impact younger workers. Jurisdictions that have ended mandatory retirement have not seen significant changes in the workforce. It would appear that giving every person the right to choose to work past 65 does not necessarily mean that they will exercise that choice.

In British Columbia there is no law that says workers must retire at 65 or any other age. However, mandatory retirement is possible because the Human Rights Code defines age as 19 years or more and less than 65 years. This means that employees can be forced to retire without the employer fearing being sued. A change to the definition of age in the Human Rights Code would in fact have the effect of ending mandatory retirement.

However, although the fix is relatively simple, it must be recognized that ending the practice of mandatory retirement is a significant change from decades of practice and attitudes about age. Many complex issues arise. These include questions around pensions and benefits, labour market issues, human rights and discrimination issues, economic impacts, and many sector-specific issues. It is important that when legislation is introduced, care is taken not to undermine existing pension and retirement rights that so many British Columbians depend on. It is also important that there be provision for employment requirements for the performance of essential job duties to continue.

Mandatory retirement is an outdated practice that has no place in the 21st century. Bank of Canada Governor David Dodge has called it a silly policy that Canadians have outgrown. I would agree. Let's bring British Columbia in line with Alberta, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, all three territories, the United States, Australia, New Zealand and dozens of other jurisdictions that have ended the practice or, in fact, never had it in the first place.

To retire or not should be a matter of choice. What has age got to do with it?



**S. Hammell:** It gives me pleasure to rise in the House to speak on the issue of mandatory retirement. The compelling reason that is often described to eliminate the use of mandatory retirement as a reason to force people to retire is that people should have the chance to make different choices. If they choose to work, they should be allowed to.

Another reason is necessity, which we in our workforce will need, as the demographic bulge of seniors moves into the future.... We will all need to be pushing at the workplace and, of course, the longevity of our lives.

I would like to talk just a minute about the longevity. Clearly, our lives are lengthening. We now have a greater understanding of what we need to do to promote a healthier lifestyle. We all know we need to exercise more. We need to ensure that fat doesn't accumulate around the waist and abdomen. We all know that well. We need to limit the amount of processed foods we eat, and we do need to understand the differences between healthy fats and not so healthy fats, as is carbohydrates.... But we know that. We have a much greater knowledge now of what it takes to be healthy than we did when my father was growing up.

[1110]

Also, parallel to that is an incredible advancement in our ability to correct illnesses as they come, so we can take more power into our hands to improve our length of life. The medical profession is also assisting when it comes to some of our illnesses. We live longer, and many, many seniors are healthier in their 60s than their parents were in their 50s and their 40s. Seniors are travelling, playing and working as they never have in the past.

Another reason that has always been touted is necessity. People have talked about necessity in terms of the necessity for seniors to continue to participate in the economy, but I want to talk about the necessity of living a life where your brain and your mind are active and participating in the society around you.

Research continues to expand our knowledge around the brain, and the fact is that people who do crosswords daily have a much greater chance of pushing some of the aging factors of the mind away. People who have human contact constantly and who interact with others, again, have the strength and the capacity to push the aging process away.

It's clear that the brain needs stimulation, and often that stimulation is found in the place of work. Now, I'm not saying that's the only place. Clearly, there are many places, but one place is the place of work.

Let me give you an example. I have a constituent, Margaret, who has raised this issue with me numerous times since I was re-elected, and I would say that time is running out on her. She is closing in on retirement, and she does not want to be forced to retire.

She loves her job. She loves the work. She likes the people she works with, and working is a critical component of her quality of life. She wants to work and does not want to be told that she cannot do something today that she was capable of doing yesterday and will

be capable of doing tomorrow. She understands every single financial argument that's out there, but she feels passionately that it should be her choice to work beyond the age of 65 if she is willing and able. And I agree.

We have evolved in our understanding about discrimination and are rightfully proud of our progress. We do not sanction discrimination based on sexual orientation, religion, creed, race. But there still is one holdout hiding in the shadows in the back corner of that box, and that is that we do allow discrimination based on age. In this province we are allowed to compel a person to retire just because he or she has reached a certain age, a certain point in time.

I was listening to the radio — I'm sure it was the CBC — last week and heard a gentleman being interviewed from Los Angeles. I think it was Los Angeles. That's not what I remember. He had punched out his last shift as a transit worker. He got up for the last time at 4:30 in the morning to go to work. At a hundred years old he was retiring. He was very articulate and clear in his conversation — a healthy 100-year-old senior, a person who had chosen to work and, at a hundred years old, was happy for it.

Not all of us will choose this route. Some seniors will join the army of volunteers that contribute to the betterment of the world around them. Some will become consultants, supplying the knowledge gained from their years of experience to other circumstances. Others will take up or spend more time on their hobbies or interests, but many will want to work.

[1115]

In this next century we can predict radical changes in our workplace and our workforce. As a society, we need to anticipate those changes so we can adapt.

We are already experiencing a shortage of skilled and unskilled workers, and this demographic shift has been predicted for some time and has been exacerbated by a heated global economy. We need to adapt, and banning mandatory retirement is only one piece of a multifaceted approach to new knowledge and change. We need to strengthen the retirement system but ban mandatory retirement. We need to vigorously train and recruit young people. We need to improve the recognition of international and employment credentials so that immigrant workers can more easily obtain employment. There's a whole world around women that this issue impacts on.

In closing, compelling a person to retire clearly discriminates against a person based on age. A person should have the choice to retire or continue to work, and this will be a real choice if a person has earned a pension and benefit that allows retiring with financial security. We must do all we can to support our seniors as they age in whatever choices they make.

**L. Mayencourt:** Once again, a pleasure to speak in the House today, particularly on this motion which has been brought forward by the member for North Vancouver-Lonsdale. The member has brought something to the forefront of British Columbians' minds,

and I think this is a very important discussion to be happening here today.

My colleague to the left of me here, the member for Peace River South....We were just talking about it, and it just does not seem fair that in British Columbia you can discriminate against someone that's over 65. In fact, that's really what the law in this province says.

I was shocked. I've been doing a lot of work on human rights legislation, really looking at the act in the last several months. I kept bumping up against: "This act doesn't apply to you if you're over 65." How terrible is that? It's a silly, silly thing. I mean, one of the key tenets of the Human Rights Code is that you can't discriminate against someone because of their age — unless they're old. What a silly, silly thing. I think it's time for us to take a look at that one. Just in terms of human rights law itself, that's an important issue.

The other thing is that I've got lots of neighbours in my neighbourhood that are in their 70s and 80s. They're still out there having a great time. They're still contributing to life. Lots of them have little jobs on the side that they're doing, whether it's volunteering at the 411 Seniors or at the West End Seniors Network, to try and keep.... And what are they trying...? They're trying to keep their brains active. They're trying to feel like they have a place in society. They're trying to feel like they can continue to contribute, and that's a very important part of life.

I mean, as much as I'd like to lie back in a beach chair in Hawaii or wherever, I want to be engaged in my life for my whole life. I want to be making a difference to people around me. I want to be making a difference in my community, and I don't think that because I'm 65 somebody should turn the switch off.

I am really in support of this member's resolution. I think she's brilliant for bringing it forward. She has talked about this for a couple of years, and I think she's got a really great idea. I think every member in this House, particularly those that are inching towards 64 and 65, had better support her motion, and we should do it in a forceful manner. I do hope that all members here will support this resolution.

[1120]

**L. Krog:** I'm delighted this morning that the member for North Vancouver-Lonsdale has brought this issue forward. I am of mixed views on this issue, and I wanted to have a little bit of fun with it this morning, if you'll forgive me.

The government is supposedly the representative of free enterprise in our society. Let people decide; let the marketplace decide what will happen. In fact, the marketplace, in practice — and the member herself emphasized this; this is a practice — has come to the conclusion that it's a good thing for people to leave companies and corporations and employment at age 65. That's really what we're talking about. It is a practice.

Companies have decided that workers should go at 65. Unions have freely negotiated contracts that include retirement at 65 and provisions for earlier times. So I

could argue from a philosophical perspective: why should we interfere in the marketplace in this particular situation, when in fact the marketplace has decided this is a good thing?

I know the hon. members are just absolutely riveted by this suggestion from me that the marketplace should decide this issue. I've got their rapt attention, and it's delightful.

Having said that, I happen to agree in principle with what the member is talking about. I agree with it particularly for one reason and one reason only that motivates me, and that is the numerous discussions I've had with constituents — women — who are in the workforce, often divorced, having worked for many years in low-level jobs and who didn't receive the benefit of a division of a pension plan. They came out of a marriage where there wasn't a pension plan to divide. Now in their mid-60s they look forward to a retirement that is largely based in poverty — low CPP benefits because they didn't enter the workforce until later in life; old age security a necessary part of their retirement income; often without the privilege of owning a home or condominium to retire into; looking at rent and the increased cost of rental accommodation.

It is for me very much a gender issue, because the only people I would suggest who are really facing problems with mandatory retirement — apart from those who simply resent the fact that they can't work anymore — are those who need to work.

If we were 20 or 30 years down the road in the kind of society that those of us on this side of the House want to see — where there was an even better retirement scheme for all Canadians and all British Columbians, where there was greater social and economic equality in our society, in the kind of new Jerusalem that Tommy Douglas talked about — I would happily say it's not an issue. But in our present society in British Columbia in 2006, those people who have not come out of a union workforce or been employed in higher-level positions in government or the corporate or private sector face a retirement which is very different than the retirement that faces those who have come out of a union workplace or government service where there is a solid pension on which they can retire in dignity. Surely, that is what we should all expect to be able to do in our later years — retire with some dignity.

There is no question, however, that the expectation in society is still largely that it is women who will raise our children, and it is women who will look after our homes. Yet there is no recognition for that. There is no pension scheme to compensate women for that role in society. There is no benefit to accrue to them over time.

So I would strongly suggest that it is time to consider ending this practice. But in the process of ending this practice of forced retirement at 65, then surely we must also be talking about increased pensions and benefits that will enable those who find themselves between the old world and the new world I'd like to see, being able to find some rest, if you will, some peace, some compensation by way of being able to work a little bit longer, build up a little more Canada

Pension, increase their savings, contribute to RRSPs or whatever.

[1125]

There are some very interesting statistics to show the transition that is taking place in society. This comes out of a book called *New Frontiers of Research on Retirement*, published by the unpaid work analysis division of Statistics Canada — a pretty worthy organization.

These are interesting statistics. In 1980 couples in which both partners were employed full-time for 49 weeks or more during the year constituted 20 percent. Now that figure, in 2000, is up to 37 percent. In 1980 couples in which the female partner contributed 40 percent or more of total household income was 19 percent. That figure by the year 2000 is up to 43 percent. The average contribution of female partners to total income of a couple in 1980 was 20 percent. Now it's 35 percent. In short, those young women who are coming into the workforce today are earning more and will make a greater contribution to a family situation, if they are in one. They will face a retirement that is far different from the retirement that is facing many women in their 50s and 60s today who are looking forward to retirement.

It will be a different world, and I come back to my main point about ensuring that until this, if you will, luckier, newer generation retires, we at least afford the opportunity to women — to men as well — to continue to work past 65.

The question is always: if there's a problem in society, who should solve it? Do we let the marketplace solve it, or does government solve it? If we recognize in this House that there is a problem with mandatory retirement, then what is the solution? Do we let the marketplace respond in terms of new contracts, different contracts to be negotiated within the private sector, for people who are self-employed to simply decide that it's long enough, that 65 is good enough? Or are we going to do something about it in terms of legislation?

I would suggest that it is time to talk about legislation. I think the member's motion is an appropriate response to open up this discussion, because I think it is an important discussion for British Columbians. We're debating a motion this morning. We're not going to change the law with this, with great respect to the hon. member. It may provide a precursor, or a heads-up perhaps, to those of us in the opposition that the government is going to do something more substantial. But we also have to consider a number of other points on this.

The evidence strongly suggests that most people don't want to work past 65. That's the reality, and banning mandatory retirement may lead to more older employees being fired for cause by their employers because they simply can't do it anymore, and you can't discriminate on the basis of age, if we follow the member's suggestion. So that presents some legal issues.

Of course, you can argue from the workers' perspectives themselves that a ban on mandatory retirement will simply place the burden of fixing old age poverty upon older workers themselves instead of us

taking up the yoke as we properly should as a society. In other words, what I've talked about in allowing people — and again, particularly women — to work past 65.... Essentially, we're saying to them: "Notwithstanding the discrimination you faced throughout your working years, notwithstanding the society in which you worked all those years, the solution to your poverty is your problem. It's not our problem as a society." I'm not entirely sure that that's a fair approach.

As I said when I started this, I wanted to have a little bit of fun with this issue but also to talk about it, if you will, from both sides. I think it is a debate worth having. I think it is the kind of debate where I'd love to see even fuller statistics. The book I pointed out this morning I commend to members of this House, as we possibly approach or anticipate some legislation from the government on this issue.

It is important. It will impact on what kind of society we want to have in British Columbia. I like the concept of a very free British Columbia where people are as unfettered in their activities as they can possibly be, having regard to the general good of society.

[1130]

I don't think that we should be expecting people to work past 65. Frankly, surely you've contributed enough by the age of 65. However, if you want to work past 65, surely we shouldn't discriminate against you for wanting to do so. We recognize that Supreme Court judges can work till 75, although I must tell you an interesting statistic, hon. Speaker. One of my friends who retired as a Supreme Court judge after only five years said that the average length of time those judges collect that pension, which we all so jealously regard with some envy, is three years. The statistical evidence would indicate that the longer you work, the chances are that your life expectancy in terms of collecting that pension will, in fact, be significantly diminished.

The firefighters of British Columbia, who made excellent presentations to both sides of this House around the presumptive causes for workplace cancers, have a number of interesting statistics around how much greater your life expectancy is if you retire earlier. If you work until 60 or 65 as a firefighter, chances are that you're not going to collect your pension very long.

These are all interesting propositions, and I look forward to hearing the comments of the other members in this House. I compliment again the member for North Vancouver-Lonsdale for bringing this motion forward. It's an interesting and important discussion, but I'll conclude my comments by saying this. Let us think of this as very much a gender issue. In my view, because of the nature of where we are in society in terms of the expectations on women and the kind of work they have been able to enjoy in society, it's an important issue for them.

**J. Rustad:** I'm very pleased to rise today in support of this motion. It's interesting listening to some of the discussion that's come by so far, in particular around

what kind of society we want to have and where we want things to go.

I believe very strongly that people have freedom of choice. That's something many people have sacrificed their lives for — that we may have freedom of choice — and I believe mandatory retirement takes away some of that choice. For me, I think it is time we bring an end to mandatory retirement. I think this is a timely motion, and it's a good discussion to have in this House. It's also a good discussion in terms of the challenges we're facing in our province.

As a province, we have a booming economy. We are creating more jobs than we have seen in a generation on a regular basis. Along with that, we're also having some challenges with skills and meeting the demands in our economy. Many of the people that are reaching retirement age these days have a tremendous amount of skill they can pass down to the next generation and to new people entering the workforce, and I think it's appropriate that if those people would like to contribute and are interested in contributing, they have the opportunity to contribute.

I know that in the private sector there's one employer in Prince George that has a policy now: "You're retired? You're hired." He's coming out and making proposals not for full-time employment or tons of hours but for giving some options to some people that are retired so that they can still contribute in the workforce. They can still have the opportunity to do things they like to do, but they also then have the opportunity to pass on some of those skills to the younger generation entering.

I applaud that kind of approach, because when you look at history, today's 65 is really the 55 or even 50 of a generation ago. People are living longer. They're living healthier and are far more active, so an arbitrary number to say, at this particular point, that you can no longer participate in the workforce seems to me to be somewhat archaic.

It's based on policy from decades ago when times were.... I remember conversations when I was young that extending the age of retirement would mean fewer opportunities for younger generations in the workforce. Now that we've turned the economy around from the '90s and now that we are generating that kind of employment, that's not even a thought on people's minds.

[1135]

There are tons of jobs out there for people, and there are tons of people out there who would like to participate, whether they are over 65 or under 65. I think it's a matter of good conscience. It makes sense that as a House, we should be having this debate and considering that mandatory retirement at age 65 is no longer an issue that should be a barrier.

As the member for Nanaimo pointed out, there are some interesting challenges that it brings out, particularly in pension plans and people who may feel they are forced to work beyond that age. I really do believe that as a society, we are quite a ways along and advanced in terms of labour laws and working condi-

tions, where no one should feel forced that they have to work.

Certainly, pension plans and being able to put away for the future are concerns. I mean, whether there's some inflation, whether people started late in life or whether there are other circumstances and people were not able to put some money away.... I'm speaking of the people that don't have the pension plans — the union pension plans, in particular — in place. Although there are many employers that have good pension plans that aren't necessarily unionized, there certainly is some concern there. Once again, that speaks clearly that if people want to have the opportunity to continue past 65, they should take it.

I think I'm going to conclude by saying that this is really about common sense. It's really about providing people with alternatives and options that make sense rather than trying to regulate the flow of life and the way people should be in society. With that, I would like to conclude my comment by saying I am very thankful to the member for North Vancouver-Lonsdale for bringing forward this motion. I enthusiastically support it.

**D. Routley:** I've got short comments to make, not having intended to stand up. But having listened to the debate here, I feel I must rise and bring the attention of the members to an article in today's *Globe and Mail* which refers to the private pension outlook and its worsening fortunes. The office of the superintendent of financial institutions this year was reviewing 84 troubled pensions on their list. That's up from 75 plans listed last year.

The body states:

"Unless significant positive changes occur in the environment, we expect to see the financial strength of pension plans to deteriorate further and the number of plans on the watch list to continue rising during 2006...."

The briefing material warns that 72 percent of private pension plans were less than fully funded as of June 2005. This is a dramatic jump from the 53 percent of plans in the same fix just six months previously.

"Falling and historically...long-term interest rates and new actuarial standards are creating such a spike in contributions to pension plans that short-term relief for corporate sponsors seems necessary."

They're referring to short-term relief, either from the members of the pension plan or from government itself.

It is not so simple just to say that we think people should be permitted to work on beyond 65. I can easily support that statement. The trouble comes when we create a situation where people are obligated to work beyond 65, where people who are members of pension funds who are in trouble are obligated to continue. If we take a step that seems so simple, seems like simple common sense, how long before pension funds and their actuaries adjust payouts and adjust expectations?

Mr. Speaker, the B.C. Liberal government seems to favour a two-tiered delivery of service. How long, sir, before there are two tiers of life as seniors, two tiers of care, two tiers of service, two tiers of retirement expect-

tations and two tiers of life expectancy? We have heard here that people who work on live shorter lives after work. We have heard here that people who retire early live longer and more productive retirement lives in retirement.

[1140]

I think there is something much more important being discussed here, and that is the principle of equity, the principle of fairness. Should a person be expected to work beyond 65? Should a person be expected, by steps that we take here — which we label as simple, which we label as simply common sense...? Should people in British Columbia have their circumstances adjusted through the unintended consequences of steps we take, which we label as simple and just common sense?

I urge caution. I, too, support choice. I represented bus drivers. Several bus drivers passing their 65th birthdays came to me and asked if I could somehow arrange for them to continue working. I had hoped to do that but wasn't able to. The reason I wasn't able to do that was that the other people in the bargaining unit felt great concern over their ability to retire at 65, not over their choice to continue working. So I urge all the members to exercise extreme caution when we adjust circumstances which have a direct impact on that principle of equity that British Columbians have for so long fought for.

**I. Black:** I rise to speak in support of this motion put forward by my esteemed colleague from North Vancouver-Lonsdale and to speak out against mandatory retirement. I do so through the eyes of somebody who's been on the opposite end of the concept of ageism, where for most of my career I have been, for lack of a better phrase, the youngest guy in the room. Indeed, I believe that holds true within our B.C. Liberal caucus today. I'm also doing so at the risk of getting some good-hearted abuse from my good colleagues from Nanaimo-Parksville, North Vancouver-Seymour and from the very able cast of the right arm of the member for West Vancouver-Garibaldi.

In the interests of the time remaining, I'll keep my comments very focused. First and foremost, this is an issue — yes — of human rights and discrimination. Much of the ground has been covered, and I won't repeat it. But it is worth noting that not only is retirement forced upon some at age 65, there's very limited recourse for somebody with the various human rights organizations. That also extends not just to the notion of retirement but also to the different treatment that those over 65 may receive in terms of pay, benefits, hours and vacations, etc., etc.

I'd also like to echo the comment with respect to the women, the underprivileged groups and the immigrants, who are left disadvantaged as a result of the current situation because of the later start that they get in the workforce and, frankly, the longer runway needed for them to secure the same type of retirement that others in the workforce who started a little earlier have got.

The second focus I have in speaking against the notion of mandatory retirement is, quite simply, that the logic behind it is flawed. If you accept for a moment that this reflects history, in part — that is, a perception that we had underutilized workforce at some point and that you had older people keeping the job of a younger person.... That simply is an economic fallacy that's been since well proven.

The growth of an economy is limited by the availability of workers of all ages. I think that's why there was so much cause for celebration within our party when the rejuvenation of the B.C. economy started to happen. We began to see a very key thing happen. People were moving back to British Columbia in the same way that.... During the very difficult times of the 1990s, when people were moving away because of the lack of opportunities, their absence from our workforce began that downward spiral that we all had to suffer through. They in turn represented the future of the economy, and that future, frankly, was leaving this great province.

The second comment with respect to the logic being flawed is that we are now facing a labour shortage but, more importantly, a shortage of skilled workers. Skill does not come overnight. Skill does not come from a week or two on a job or a simple course that gets taken. It comes from years of experience in the environment.

From a very selfish standpoint, these workers also represent taxpayers. They represent taxpayers at the peak of their earning years, and frankly, with the changing demographics in our society, we need them precisely where they are. To echo the words of my colleague from Vancouver-Burrard, why on earth would we force them out of the workforce?

I found it curious that the member for Nanaimo and the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith went down the path of talking about the notion of the collective agreements. The most prevalent form of mandatory retirement found in the data is within contractual agreements and the associated pension plans, most notably within union collective agreements.

[1145]

This is very sensitive ground for them to be going down, because it's in that same environment of collective agreements where the interests of some of the at-risk groups that I mentioned earlier — particularly women, particularly immigrants — are comprised through that process. The intent, of course, is to have benefits for both parties, but the data simply does not support that. The work of loyalty and the diligence that is expected as a result of back-end loading things like pension schemes and whatnot just has not proven to be true in those jurisdictions where the legislation has been put in place to abolish contractual mandatory retirement. There have been no adverse consequences in those areas, and the senior community is doing much better as a result.

I will conclude my comments by citing a philosophy that I try to live by, which is: in all things, balance — whether that's looking at economic models, whether it's in our personal lives, whether it's looking at gov-

ernment policy or whether it's looking at how we raise our children. It is an ongoing pursuit, and it's a moving target. I strike that balance in this area by invoking two expressions. Both of them, in my view, are truisms. Those expressions on balance cause me to not only value our older workforce but also to identify the fact that we need our older workforce very, very much.

Thus I speak out against mandatory retirement with these two expressions. The first expression where I find this balance is the notion that there is a great deal of difference between 20 years' experience and one year's experience 20 times. That may be true. However, equally and perhaps more urgently at this stage of the debate, there is also no substitute for time on this planet.

**R. Cantelon:** I would like to congratulate and pick up on the final point that the member for North Vancouver-Lonsdale made. She made this point: what's age got to do with it? That is, I think, a central point here. That's what we're really talking about.

The greatest sultan in the empire of Suleman the Magnificent of the Ottoman Empire.... His entire administration was in crisis. It was crumbling. It was a massive empire. He turned to his 72-year-old grand vizier to take over the administration of this great empire, and it flourished as never before under his leadership for the next ten years.

I think this is a clear demonstration that age hasn't got anything to do with it. Either you've got that spark of leadership, creativity and vigour, or you don't. You're born with it, or you're not.

There was a not-too-oblique and perhaps not-too-subtle comment by the member opposite — actually, opposite but on the same side — for Port Moody-Westwood. Some would be too eager, I think the reference was, to see those who have leadership skills, those who have innate abilities to step aside. I think the implication is "to make room." I think we have to recognize, though, that we need to not base it on age. It should be based on capability, on vigour and on the ability to continue to lead as demonstrated by this. There are many other issues — pension and so forth.

I would like to relate a personal story. My dear mother was a school teacher for many, many years, and of course her pension was based on what level she reached by retirement. I was a young man in school, and she re-entered school shortly before her 60th birthday. I barely beat getting my degree before she got hers. It was a great embarrassment. But when she did get a degree, she had to teach for five years before she retired.

In those days there was a convenience because there weren't great records of how old you were, and the only record was in her church. Conveniently, that burned down. There was a good relationship between her and the superintendent of the school of the day, sort of a nudge-nudge, wink-wink relationship. Everyone knew she was over 65, and indeed she taught until she was 70 years old — teaching grade-one students in

Manitoba, where the kids came to school in March with muddy boots and you would have to clean them up and sit them down, often with some 40 children in the school. When I attended her funeral — we went back to Winnipeg for the funeral — I was struck by the number of people who remembered her from grade one.

Coming back to my earlier comments, the first years in childhood and life are most important, and she made enough of an impression on many of her students.... They came to me and said: "She changed my life." Well, she was able to demonstrate her ability and leadership and vigour right into her 70th year and then traveled the world, going to Russia and so on and so forth.

[1150]

We need these people. It's a matter of needing the continuing leadership and strength of people who have been able to demonstrate their abilities well past their 65 years, and I would add a cautionary to younger members who may seem too eager to see these people step aside. We need these people.

**D. MacKay:** The motion brought forward by the member for North Vancouver-Lonsdale is one that is very fitting and certainly long overdue. This job is kind of interesting in that you're always learning something. It was an experience at a town hall meeting in the small community of Grandisle, which I was informed of by way of a senior who was rather displeased with a *Vancouver Sun* story about how seniors have less protection under the law.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

The first paragraph in that newspaper article says that B.C. seniors have no legal protection from age discrimination and that they're fighting mad. It goes on, also, to talk about the fact that the human rights panel can't hear discrimination complaints from seniors, and that thing really hit home.

Of course, I was a year younger then, and now I'm a year older, and I'm caught up in that issue today. Just last year I had a senior public servant in the community of Smithers who was not ready for retirement. He felt he wasn't ready for retirement. His supervisor said he wasn't ready for retirement yet. He was doing a good job; he was capable; he wanted to carry on. But when he hit his 65th birthday, he was forced to retire. Now, that was a shame because he had the experience. He knew what he was doing and still had lots to offer for the job that he was in, so that was unfortunate.

Here we are today, talking about removing the mandatory age of retirement. That's not talking about forcing people to work beyond age 65. It's giving people the option to decide if they want to continue beyond the age of 65. Right now, when you reach age 65, you're forced to retire, whether you want to or not. So it's not about forcing people to work beyond the age of 65.

I know there are others in the chamber that want to speak today, and I just want to stand up and add my

support to the motion put forward by the member for North Vancouver-Lonsdale.

**K. Krueger:** I'll greatly accelerate the comments I would otherwise have made — or abbreviate them, actually — because the member for Nanaimo didn't, and there are lots of people who would like to speak. I just want to also express my heartfelt support for the motion. I've always felt it's wrong that government would dictate to people when they should stop working or that anybody else should. As long as they're able and willing and desiring to work, who should ever interfere with that?

I know it's a tension for some of the members who've spoken opposite, and it's a tension for some of the more radical trade-unionist types. I've always thought that that's quite a clash with the principles that the labour movement espouses — that people would want to have such an arbitrary rule just because they reach a certain age.

I was a Labour critic in the '90s when the NDP brought in the pension suspension bill. We opposed it, spoke against it. At one point I was asking rhetorically in the House why in the world the NDP or anyone else would think that people wanted to carry on working in spite of the fact that they had a pension or that they were pension age. The NDP minister of the day suggested that the reason was greed. We were really shocked at that. It has nothing to do with greed. It has everything to do with people's needs, people's lifestyles, people's desire to support their children, their spouses, their estate and their community. I say that it's

people's own business. As long as they're able to do the job and they want to do it, more power to them.

**Mr. Speaker:** Noting the hour, the member for Richmond-Steveston.

**J. Yap:** Noting the hour, I just wanted to very quickly add my support to this motion. I'm grateful to the member for North Vancouver-Lonsdale for bringing this forward. Many good reasons have been offered from both sides of the House for why we should support this motion. For me, fundamentally, it's an issue of human rights and fairness. At the end of the day, if an individual is able to and willing to and wants to continue to work beyond age 65, in this province — just as in four other provinces and three territories — he or she should be able to do that.

With that, noting the hour, I move adjournment of debate.

J. Yap moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:55 a.m.





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