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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

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

SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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M. Karagianis
K. Conroy
A. Dix
Hon. M. de Jong

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2006

The House met at 2:04 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Tributes

PRINCE GEORGE HOCKEY CHAMPIONS

Hon. S. Bond: Today I would like the House to just recognize a significant accomplishment by a Prince George hockey team that recently spent Thanksgiving in the United States. The midget team there won. They were one of two Canadian teams at that tournament in Denver, Colorado. Under the head coach, Jason Garneau, they actually brought home the gold to Prince George. We're very excited and very proud of the team, and I hope the Legislature will recognize them today.

[1405]

DIRK MEISSNER

Hon. M. de Jong: Two submissions to the House today — one happy, one not so happy.

Dirk Meissner from the Canadian Press was in Vancouver on Thursday night, where the Vancouver firefighters presented him with the International Association of Fire Fighters award for the best column or editorial in North America. He received the prestigious honour for his piece on amendments to the Workers Compensation Act to recognize the increased cancer risk faced by professional firefighters.

The International Association of Fire Fighters Media Awards Contest is conducted annually. It honours reporting and photography that best portray the professional and dangerous work of firefighters and emergency personnel in the United States and Canada. There were, I am told, over 225 entries in the 2006 media awards contest. I know that all members of the House would want to congratulate Mr. Meissner on his most impressive achievement.

Introductions by Members

J. Horgan: Not in the gallery today, but certainly in our hearts and our minds, is the MLA for Victoria-Hillside, who was father to Rory Fleming this past weekend. Would the House please welcome Rory to the world.

Tributes

FRANK CALDER

Hon. M. de Jong: The fact that all members of the House would know this does not, I think, negate the possibility of taking a moment to remember the fact that a 26-year servant of this House passed away on November 4. Of course, I'm referring to Dr. Frank Calder.

Members of the chamber, some of them here, were in attendance for his memorial service.

British Columbia and Canada lost a true giant in the passing of Dr. Frank Calder. He was a member of the Order of Canada and the Order of British Columbia. His life really was characterized by a series of firsts. He was the first status Indian, as the term is used, to be admitted to the University of British Columbia. He was the first aboriginal person in the country to be elected to a legislature, and remarkably, he served in this chamber for 26 years — a fact that I was not aware of.

He was the first aboriginal person to enter the Canadian Parliament and the first to be appointed as a minister of the Crown in British Columbia. He was a founder of the Nisga'a Tribal Council and served as its president for 20 years. He was later named chief of chiefs by the clans that comprise the Nisga'a Tribal Council. He was a guiding spirit for British Columbians, Canadians — aboriginal and non-aboriginal.

Mr. Speaker, he truly was a pioneer, a giant amongst men and women, and I hope that you, on behalf of all members of this chamber, will convey to his family our sincerest condolences and our great thanks for their having shared Dr. Frank Calder with all of us.

M. Farnworth: This side of the House would like to join with the government side in recognizing the tremendous contribution that Frank Calder made, not only to aboriginal people in British Columbia but aboriginal people right across this country, and the contribution that he made to the people of British Columbia and to redressing the grievances of the past, fighting to ensure that those injustices are corrected and rectified, but more importantly, helping to build and make reconciliation the framework with which we proceed in the future.

I think it is only fitting that this House take the time to do that, and we send our condolences as well.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

PARLIAMENTARY CALENDAR ACT, 2006

C. James presented a bill intituled Parliamentary Calendar Act, 2006.

C. James: I move that the bill be introduced and read now a first time.

Motion approved.

C. James: The Parliamentary Calendar Act, 2006, establishes a set parliamentary schedule for the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. Many members of this House will recall that when the significant amendments to standing orders were introduced in the last parliament, the government stated that in order to maintain a balance between the will of government and the necessity of adequate accountability, and in exchange for granting government the authority to in-

voke closure on business by a fixed date in the spring, a fall session was added to the calendar.

[1410]

Somewhere along the way that principle was abandoned, much to the detriment of the effectiveness of this place and, more importantly, the interests of the people of this province. This act establishes permanently a fall session that would not be at the will of the Premier or the government but at the will of the members of this place, as it should be.

I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at a sitting after today.

Bill M209, Parliamentary Calendar Act, 2006, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

WORKERS COMPENSATION AMENDMENT ACT, 2006

G. Gentner presented a bill intituled Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2006.

G. Gentner: I move the Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2006, be read a first time today.

Motion approved.

G. Gentner: As you all know, the Workers Compensation Act went through some drastic changes in 2002. There were changes made to the benefit levels, the average earnings, pensions after 65, inflation adjustment and the receipt of CPP disability benefits. These are just some of the changes that were made to the act.

The government would have you believe that the purpose of the Workers Compensation Amendment Act was to restore the system's financial sustainability and modernize how benefits for injured workers would be calculated. Modernize? What exactly is modernization? I'll tell you what it means, Mr. Speaker. It means to deny the rights of injured workers.

The number-one case that walks into my office is workers compensation cases. I'm talking about hard-working, honest and proud individuals who have had the misfortune to suffer a work-related injury or disease.

However, it is my understanding that there is one particular change that was not based on the recommendations of the Winter report of 2001. I'm talking about the change to the basis for determining permanent partial disability pension levels. Under the previous legislation, there was a dual system in place. The injured worker would receive compensation based on either loss of function or loss of earnings, whichever was higher and more equitable for the injured worker.

The current legislation has been changed so the compensation is now based solely on loss of function, except in exceptional cases which are very rare. The Winter report even recommended that the dual system remain in place.

It is the right of injured workers to have their compensation based on fair legislative rules and fair policy

and practices, but the current Workers Compensation Act and the current policies of WCB are hardly fair. I propose a private member's bill so that we can start bringing back fairness and equity to the injured worker, which is what he or she rightfully deserved.

I move the bill be tabled to the next sitting of the House.

Bill M210, Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2006, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

GLOBAL CENTRE FOR PLURALISM

J. Nuraney: I had the honour and the privilege to attend a signing ceremony between the Prime Minister, Hon. Stephen Harper, and His Highness the Aga Khan for the creation of the Global Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa. The Global Centre for Pluralism will be a major new international centre for research, education and exchange about the values, practices and policies that underpin pluralistic societies.

[1415]

Drawing inspiration from the Canadian experience, the centre will function as a global repository. The centre will function also as a source of information for knowledge about fostering pluralistic values, policies and practices. It will work with the countries to nurture successful civil societies in which every citizen — irrespective of cultural, religious or ethnic differences — is able to realize his or her full potential. In his remarks His Highness the Aga Khan described the Canadian practice of seeking unity in diversity as Canada's gift to the world.

Under the terms of the agreement, the government of Canada will contribute \$30 million towards the establishment of the centre's endowment fund. The Aga Khan will also contribute a minimum of \$30 million toward the endowment and the refurbishing of the former Canadian War Museum, which the government is making available on a long-term lease to serve as the centre's global headquarters.

This new institution will play a significant role in promoting democracy, good governance, a more equitable sharing of world resources between the developed and developing countries, and the projection of Canadian values such as the rule of law, human rights and respect for diversity.

I am very proud to be a member of the Shia Ismaili Muslim community, which is partnering this lofty project, a true tribute to Canada and its values.

VALUE-ADDED AND REMANUFACTURING SECTORS IN FOREST INDUSTRY

B. Simpson: I had the pleasure of spending some time with the president of the Independent Lumber

Remanufacturers Association a few weeks ago. The members of this association employ approximately 4,000 workers and ship four billion board feet of wood products per year, with a value in excess of \$2.5 billion, making the association one of the biggest employers in B.C.'s forest products industry and a vital contributor to the B.C. economy. A similar association exists on Vancouver Island, the Vancouver Island Association of Wood Processors, which represents 57 businesses, employing more than 600 workers in communities from Victoria to Port McNeill and Parksville to Port Alberni.

The individual member companies of these two associations and others like them represent the future of our forest industry because, by necessity, the future of the industry lies in extracting full value from every tree harvested in this province. However, the sector cannot thrive if the entrepreneurs who run these companies must struggle every day simply to survive.

They cannot put their creative energies towards growth if they have to fight every day to secure fibre supply. They cannot grow if they are not given assistance to secure the financial capital required to expand their operations. Without security of fibre, banking institutions are very reluctant to underwrite the expansion of this sector. Finally, they cannot expand to their full capacity unless a forest policy framework recognizes their particular needs and circumstances and takes into account the punitive impact that the softwood lumber agreement will have on them.

If the forest industry is to continue to contribute to B.C.'s economy in the future, the entrepreneurs in the value-added and remanufacturing sectors must be given every opportunity to grow and to contribute as fully as possible to the B.C. economy, both now and in the future. This House owes these entrepreneurs our utmost respect and our support.

DAWSON CREEK FALL FAIR AND EXHIBITION

B. Lekstrom: It's my privilege today to stand in this House and speak about an outstanding event in my riding of Peace River South. This event is the Dawson Creek Fall Fair and Exhibition, which is held annually in Dawson Creek but encompasses all of our surrounding area in the entire Peace region with their participation. In 2007 we will mark the 85th birthday of this fair and exhibition, one that we're all very proud of and one I encourage each and every member in this House and all British Columbians to make an effort to attend if it is at all possible.

This event showcases agriculture and the importance of it, not just to the Peace region or our province and our country but to the entire world. We have people that travel the Alaska Highway and, during their tour, attend this fair if they happen to be travelling through our region during the time that it's put on. All, without exception, are truly amazed at the quality of this exhibition.

It takes a thousand volunteers to put this together, including the service sector, which contributes time and equipment to host this event. My thanks go out to each and every one of those people. It encompasses cattle shows, horse shows, a world-class rodeo that rivals the Calgary Stampede. The World Professional Chuckwagon Association run their wagons there as well. One of the highlights is the heavy involvement of the 4-H Club in the entire region. They're actually the future for agriculture in our great province, so it is tremendous.

This year 25,000 people attended our fair and exhibition. For a community of roughly 12,000 people, that's quite a turnout. But as I said, this is about more than Dawson Creek. This is truly about the Peace country coming together to host this. This year they received the award of excellence as the number-one fair in British Columbia from the B.C. Association of Agricultural Fairs. As well, they won the committee of the year award from the Professional Chuckwagon Association as the best committee and best organization that has put these together.

In closing, my heartfelt thanks go out again to all of the volunteers that put this together, with special mention to Ms. Connie Patterson, who has been involved in agriculture her entire life but really is the backbone of this event. Please visit.

INVESTIGATION INTO SULLIVAN MINE ACCIDENT

N. Macdonald: On Monday, May 15 of this year a contractor, as this House knows, was killed in a small shed at the Sullivan mine reclamation site. It would be two days before he was missed, and on the morning of May 17 three other people died in that shed. In the six months that have followed, the families of those killed have tried to deal with the tragic loss of their loved ones.

Kimberley and surrounding communities turned out in massive numbers for a memorial service attended by the Lieutenant-Governor and ministers of government as well as paramedics, police and fire personnel not only from across the province but from across North America. Kimberley has since dedicated an ambulance to the memory of the two lost paramedics.

A commitment was made repeatedly by government that they would find out what happened and that they would work to see that it would not happen again. We know that is what is needed for the families to allow closure; we know that is what is needed for the community to allow closure. I wanted members to know where we are, because so many of you very graciously offered condolences to the community in the spring.

The first report of the accident was presented on Monday, October 30 in Cranbrook by the chief mine inspector. Families were given a presentation the night before. What has been very clear from the family members is that they need much more. They were in no way

satisfied with the report and raised a number of issues that they felt needed to be dealt with.

At this time there is a coroner's report being prepared, and it is hoped that it will do more to answer questions that are still outstanding. If not, the community and family will need a coroner's inquest, and the commitments made by members of this House on behalf of all of us on May 17 and at the memorial service will be tested. We simply cannot let them down. Kimberley is a wonderful community that stands together in good times and hard times. It has and will continue to support those within the community that are grieving.

CYPRESS MOUNTAIN OLYMPIC VENUE

J. McIntyre: I am very excited to report today that Olympic fever is hitting British Columbia. Our first completed Olympic venue was just opened on November 16 for everyone to use, and it is well over three years before the games are set to begin and only six or seven months after construction began.

Our government is committed to leaving lasting legacies of the 2010 Winter Games, leading up to and beyond the Olympics. At Cypress Mountain in West Vancouver-Garibaldi athletes and teams can now come to train and participate in sport and become familiar with the facilities and the courses before the Olympics arrive.

Cypress Mountain will play host to ten events, including men's and women's aerials and moguls as well as the snowboard half-pipe and snowboard cross. Thanks to the recent additions and upgrades, such as an in-ground half-pipe, a new freestyle site and a re-graded parallel giant slalom course, we'll have the chance to experience world-class Olympic facilities right in our own back yard.

As the host province, we want to see as many B.C. athletes as possible competing in our games. By completing the Cypress Bowl venue so early, the advance training time should give B.C.'s athletes an advantage when it comes to showing their stuff to the world in 2010.

[1425]

But the 2010 Olympics are more than just games. They're about opportunity — opportunities for tourism, opportunities for athletics, opportunities for businesses and opportunities for volunteerism. It's our opportunity as a community, as a province and as a country to highlight to the hundreds of thousands of athletes, visitors, media and spectators worldwide exactly why British Columbia is the best place on earth.

All levels of government have been working together collaboratively to ensure we're prepared, to ensure everyone is ready. We will be ready, but the question is: is the world ready for the competition they're going to face from our athletes at this venue? I can't wait.

WORKPLACE DEATHS AND INJURIES

C. Puchmayr: There have been 11 deaths so far this year in the B.C. forest sector. Some will say it has im-

proved since the senseless carnage of last year, but I remind this House that one death is unacceptable. So are the serious workplace injuries that continue to permanently maim men and women, young and old.

We need to understand that this was a year when we saw significant reductions in log harvest due to summer drought and unprecedented autumn rains. As we head towards the season where many of us share and reflect on the past year, a season where we gather with our family and friends, we should not forget those who will not be coming home to their loved ones because they were a victim of an industrial work-related accident.

This is a time that should be a festive season for all, yet it is one filled with heartache and pain for those who have lost a loved one — a time of heartache and pain for the families of the 188 fatalities that we remembered on the day of mourning this year, a time of heartache and pain for those who have died this year because of the work that they did, a time of heartache and pain for the families of the Sullivan mine disaster. This is also a time when injured workers suffer from reductions in pension benefits and rehabilitation premiums from the new directives of WorkSafe B.C.

Yet this is a time of great prosperity. Many large multinational corporations that operate in our province benefit from the toil of our citizens' labour — a prosperous time for the global resource markets as they bring in record profits due to our global commodity prices; a prosperous time for shareholders and investors; a prosperous time for government coffers, both provincial and federal, as these global commodities enter into our general revenues.

Let's work together to ensure that profit is not put ahead of people. Let's work together to ensure that the pendulum swings a balance that creates a fairness in how our resources are extracted in a manner that protects our workers and our environment. That, Mr. Speaker, is what I want for Christmas.

Oral Questions

HEALTH MINISTER ACTION ON PRIVATE HEALTH CARE SERVICES

C. James: Over the weekend British Columbians learned more about the Minister of Health's inability and refusal to protect B.C.'s public health care system. We heard that the minister was once again surprised at another credit-card-for-medicine scheme — this time a private for-profit emergency room — a scheme that, according to Dr. Godley, "lets us go back to the old days when people bartered for medical services."

The minister tried to blame his former deputy, Penny Ballem, for his ignorance. To the Minister of Health: can he explain why he was caught so uninformed? And will he agree that he should have known about this issue before the media contacted him?

Hon. G. Abbott: I thank the member for her question. The use of sanctimony as a political weapon can

certainly be, in some circumstances, a powerful one. When it's used as this opposition likes to use it, it does invite the stench of hypocrisy to overwhelm it.

[1430]

I'd like to know from the Leader of the Opposition where she was in March 1999 when the False Creek Surgical Centre was formed. Where was she? I know where the federal Health critic was. She was the Minister of Health of British Columbia — didn't say a word. I know where the opposition Health critic was. He was a chief political adviser to the government of British Columbia — didn't say a word. I know where the Opposition House Leader was. He was a member of executive council along with several other members of the opposition.

None of them spoke up to say a word against False Creek Surgical. They should keep that in perspective.

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

C. James: It's clear that the Minister of Health doesn't know anything about his own ministry, including the fact that he has been the minister for the last year, and that's what we're talking about here. This isn't an isolated incident. It's another example of this minister's pattern of surprise and complete ignorance.

Emergency room crises — we heard the minister call doctors alarmist, and he denied the story. Separated seniors — the minister actually dismissed this story as fearmongering. MRI scandals — the minister said it couldn't happen, and it did. Extra billing and queue-jumping — the minister was caught once again unaware and uninformed.

This new credit card ER wants to charge patients \$200 to get in the door, and the minister claims he had no idea that it was in the works. Will the Minister of Health please explain to this House why he is repeatedly in the dark when it comes to our health care system?

Hon. G. Abbott: When we talk about the False Creek Surgical Centre, I think we also have to remember that there were a few other centres that had some things in common with them: Boardwalk Surgery Centre, Delbrook Surgical Centre, Broadmead Surgery Centre, Metrotown Surgical Centre, Parklane Surgical Centre, Seafield Surgical Centre, Okanagan Surgical Centre, Valley Surgery Centre and about 20 other private surgery centres that were put in place during the tenure of the NDP during the 1990s.

I noted with some interest the Leader of the Opposition calling for my resignation last Friday.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. G. Abbott: If that were the case, there would be 26 desk-beaters across the way that would be tendering their resignations as well.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

The Leader of the Opposition has a further supplemental.

C. James: If the Health Minister spent a little less time researching the past and spent more time paying attention to the Health Ministry, we might not have the system in chaos right now.

In March in North Vancouver, a doctor informed patients he was going to start charging an annual user fee. The minister promised us a review. We've not heard anything back. We're still waiting for the minister to take action about user fees at Copeman and at Options Clinic. Now we have a Kamloops surgeon setting up queue-jumping schemes, and now we have a credit card emergency room. I expect there are more.

Again, my question is to the Minister of Health. What specific steps has he taken to make sure that he and his office are actually better informed about our health care system in the future?

[1435]

Hon. G. Abbott: What we do is observe the rule of law on this side of the House. We observe the rule of law. When we receive a complaint, we forward it to the appropriate body for adjudication.

I know the Leader of the Opposition would be the first to leap up, were I to interfere in any of those appropriate processes. She would say that is an outrage. She does not, however, appear to want to see those due processes take place. Would she feel it appropriate, for example, were I to launch an investigation into why her federal leader decided, when he had a pain in the Shouldice, that he would go to a private clinic to get it? Would that be appropriate?

Every time, in every case...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members, let's listen to the answer. Minister, continue.

Hon. G. Abbott: ...where we have received a complaint, we have followed up that complaint appropriately, thoroughly and properly.

A. Dix: Well, in this case, the Ministry of Health was informed in January about this very serious issue, which the minister himself has acknowledged is serious, and the minister claims he was ignorant that it was going on as of last Thursday.

The minister also claimed on Friday that he has launched an internal review to explain why he was kept in the dark. I'd like to ask him how it's going. In particular, can the minister tell this House whether his office, his ministerial assistant Alex Dutton, received a request from Dr. Godley earlier this year seeking a meeting to discuss False Creek Surgical Centre's private emergency room or "urgent care" proposal?

Hon. G. Abbott: The letter of January 18 was from the executive assistant to Dr. Godley, who I believe is Sherry Wiebe, and her letter was to Alex Dutton, executive assistant at the Ministry of Health. The request contained in the letter was to offer me what was termed a courtesy briefing in regard to exciting innovations that were proposed — their words — by False Creek Surgical. They did go to some pains to assure that what was being proposed was within the bounds of the Canada Health Act. I understand that request for a meeting was forwarded to the deputy minister, and that is what we know at this point.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

A. Dix: Let me get this straight. The Minister of Health was kept in the dark by his own staff about what was going on at False Creek Surgical Centre.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Member.

A. Dix: The letter went to the Minister of Health about a serious issue like this, and he is so committed to defending the Medicare Protection Act, so committed to defending the Canada Health Act and so committed to defending patients in British Columbia that it took him.... Well, in fact, he didn't take any action, any steps on this question.

My question to the Minister of Health is: will his office be part of his so-called investigation into what happened, and can he explain why the letter from Dr. Godley's office to his office wasn't followed up by him in January of this year?

Hon. G. Abbott: We receive thousands of requests to meet annually. Some of those we're able to oblige; others we are not. I'm certainly still looking into it. We've reviewed the correspondence files a couple of times, and we'll continue to do that to see if there's further we discover.

Perhaps the member can tell me, as the chief political adviser when he was...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. G. Abbott: ...the former Rasputin to the court of the chronically misguided back in 1999, what his advice was to his government. Did he keep that secret? Did he keep it secret from his ministers?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Minister, when there's quiet, you can continue. Government members, please.

Hon. G. Abbott: What was his advice as chief political adviser around the False Creek Surgical Centre? Was it a great and perilous threat to the province, as the member might suggest today, or was it not?

K. Conroy: Let's bring it back to 2006. Last week the minister was informed about a surgeon in Kamloops who had set up his own queue-jumping scheme. A patient was told that \$350 would get her to the front of the line. The minister once again pleaded ignorance. He said it was an isolated case.

On Friday the opposition received an e-mail from another concerned British Columbian. Colleen Abbott was told she would have to wait three years to see a foot specialist, or she could pay the fee and get in to see the same doctor in a private clinic in 30 days. Three years or 30 days.

How many other cases does the minister need to see before he admits that credit card medicine is becoming the new reality in B.C.?

Hon. G. Abbott: In fact, what we have seen during the last five years is far more timely attention to surgical procedures than was ever the case back in the 1990s.

Today, for example, in British Columbia we are doing 86 percent more knee replacements than we did back in 2001 — 86 percent more knee replacements; we've almost doubled the number — and 47 percent more hip replacements than back in 2001. Surgery is more timely than it ever was under the NDP.

If the member has a concern, I'm surprised she has not forwarded the information to my office. I hope she has forwarded it to my office. It's great to raise these things in question period and to make a political stunt around them, but if she wants something done, she should forward the information to my office.

I would gladly receive it. I can assure the member I will take the case to the College of Physicians and Surgeons, who are the appropriate adjudicative body in this matter, as we did last Thursday when the information was forwarded to us.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

K. Conroy: Yes, I do, Mr. Speaker. It's interesting. You'll get public health care in this province if you have money or if the opposition brings the case to the attention of the minister.

In fact, the opposition did know about this case, but so has the minister because we got the e-mail the same day as the minister was sent the e-mail.

Ms. Abbott was referred by Dr. Alistair Younger out of the public system into his own private practice at the Cambie Surgery Centre. It's another example of doctors referring their own patients to the private system and then making a profit. For \$500 she can jump to the front of the line.

What is the minister going to do about this to put an end to this blatant queue-jumping?

Hon. G. Abbott: Whenever we receive information which suggests that physicians, or indeed any other

health practitioners, are conducting themselves inappropriately in relation to the statutes of this province and the code of conduct which is expected by the College of Physicians and Surgeons, we will forward all of the information we have to the College of Physicians and Surgeons for follow-up on that.

We did that last Friday. We did that with another case today, which the members may wish to raise here shortly. I don't know.

Whenever we get information about an apprehended or suggested breach of statute or code of conduct, we follow up on it with the appropriate bodies. In this case, it will be with the College of Physicians and Surgeons. I invite the member to submit whatever information she has with respect to Ms. Abbott, and we will ensure that it is taken forward to the College of Physicians and Surgeons for their attention.

[1445]

FUNDING FOR LIMITS TO CLASS SIZE AND COMPOSITION

D. Cubberley: Bill 33, Education (Learning Enhancement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006, places restrictions on class size and composition in B.C. classrooms. The Minister of Education has directed school districts to absorb any new costs associated with class size and composition requirements. At the same time, she's told school districts to absorb all the costs of lost revenues due to the school fees decision. For good measure, this summer she quietly withheld the annual facilities grants owed to school districts for work already done.

My question to the minister: can she tell us just how many classes across British Columbia exceed the cap of three, and whether she still believes the convenient fiction that school districts have enough money to meet all of their obligations?

Hon. S. Bond: Bill 33... We came to the conclusion that we did need to respond to some of the challenges in classrooms today, and by bringing together partners at the education round table, we created a bill that began to address those issues. School startup went very, very well this year, despite the member opposite's comments. In fact, let's look at the record. Funding for education in British Columbia is at the highest level it has ever been at, and we continue to add funds.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. The member has a supplemental.

D. Cubberley: The minister has a very elastic concept of school funding. Elastic money — one allocation fits all needs.

The figures that I have seen — and I notice the minister didn't give us any figures on how many classes — show that some 7,577 classes are above the cap of three. That's only a partial count — 49 out of 60 school dis-

tricts. In Sooke school district alone, 130 classes have five or more children with IEPs. Some have as many as ten, and one has 14. Can the minister tell us how many of these classrooms have not received additional resources and which school districts are reporting implementation issues that cannot be met with existing funding?

Hon. S. Bond: In fact, this is the first government that actually made an effort to ask every single class-size number in the entire province. We also know this. Even at a time of record-level funding in this province, we believe that the people that are best designed and best trained and best equipped to make decisions about classroom size are at the school level, with principals and parents and administrators working together. We have excellent educators and teachers in this province, who are working to make sure that our class size is reasonable, appropriate and fair to all students.

POTENTIAL SCHOOL CLOSINGS IN CARIBOO AREA

C. Wyse: Is the minister aware of the Trillium report of school district 27, in which it's proposed to close eight more schools in order to balance its budget?

Hon. S. Bond: You know, it's simple to stand up and say all the time, as the members opposite do, that it's all about the money. Well, has the member opposite done his homework? If we look around the world, enrolment in schools is declining not just in British Columbia but in Saskatchewan, Australia, Ireland — all across the world. Schools have to adjust to that.

Yes, I'm aware of that report. Closing a school is never an easy decision. It's difficult; it's painful. But the demographics in this province continue to show decline in enrolment not just today — 37,000 students less — but that will continue for at least another decade.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

[1450]

C. Wyse: In fairness, it being question period, the answer is that I have done my homework. Is the minister aware that the Trillium report as well as school district 27's financial report show that the projected nearly \$1 million budget shortfall arises from the inadequate funding of mandated provincial programs and the lack of funding to implement Bill 33, which alone is close to \$400,000?

My question is: what will the minister do to intervene to prevent the closure of eight schools in Cariboo South?

Hon. S. Bond: It is always difficult to make decisions about school closures. In fact, we believe that locally elected school trustees actually work hard to use the resources that they're given. What is this government going to do? It's going to continue to make education a priority. We are at record levels of funding.

We're going to continue to fund schools appropriately and make sure our children have the best opportunities possible.

FUNDING FOR NORTHERN AND RURAL SCHOOLS

B. Simpson: I'm glad to hear the Minister of Education say that she was committed to funding school districts and school boards appropriately. In '04-05 school district 27 did a significant restructure in order to meet the ministry's funding constraints and in order to avoid school closures. Subsequent to that, Bill 33 costs, distributed learning costs, contractual obligations and other provincially mandated programs and policies have created the deficit situation in school district 27.

My question to the minister: if she's talking about funding school boards appropriately, will she address this shortfall so that eight schools do not have to close because of this minister's inadequate, inappropriate funding of provincially mandated programs?

Hon. S. Bond: I think it's ironic that the member opposite stands up and talks about funding levels. How simple is it? Let's look at the answer. We have 37,000 fewer children in the school system. We are projected to continue to see that decline take place — another 30,000 fewer students over the next number of years. In fact, funding — let's remember — during this government's mandate is at the highest level despite that rapid decline.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental?

B. Simpson: I do, and it intrigues me that the minister starts talking about how simple it is, because that captures this government's idea about educational funding. In fact, it is not simple. One size does not fit all. Rural communities and remote rural schools need different funding formulas in this province.

If the minister had done her homework, she would have read the Trillium report, which states explicitly that the education funding system in this province now encourages fewer schools with larger enrolments. And in the case of school district 27, the first targeted schools to close are rural, remote schools where the funding formula does not work.

My question is to the Minister of Education. A few years ago, the community of Wells had to go on a hunger strike to get this government's attention to the fact that if they lost their school, they lost their community.

The community of Likely in my riding is one of the first targeted schools to close. Are they going to have to go on a hunger strike in order to get this minister to pay attention to their needs and to keep that school open? Eight school closures. To the minister: what is she going to do to keep those schools open?

[1455]

Hon. S. Bond: Obviously, a tutorial is necessary for the member opposite. In fact, the current funding for-

mula actually has recognition factors for northern and rural communities, including geography, dispersion, climate, all those things that matter in northern communities where we live.

In fact, this government has provided a buffer grant for those districts who are losing enrolment at a rate more rapid than expected. So it's time for the member opposite to go back to school, to do his homework and to recognize that this government has placed funding at an all-time high in this province.

ALCAN POWER SALES TO B.C. HYDRO

J. Horgan: My question is for the Minister of Energy. Recently B.C. Hydro issued a call for power. Secret and separate from that was a deal cooked up between the government of British Columbia and the Aluminum Company of Canada, also known as Alcan. That deal commits B.C. Hydro to purchasing power and providing profits to Alcan of over 1,000 percent.

My question is a very, very simple one to the Minister of Energy. Can he advise this House at what time price gouging became the main pillar of the B.C. energy policy? Can he tell this House why this deal is being rammed through the B.C. Utilities Commission without adequate public consultation?

Hon. R. Neufeld: Well, again, we see that the opposition now are opposed to actually getting electricity from clean power generation. They named it in the House. One day they're against one type of generation. Next day they're against another type of generation. It's pretty simple. You just have to go to the website, to www.bcuc.com. Have a look, and the deal is there. That's all they have to do.

I'll help you with the research, Member.

Mr. Speaker: Member has a supplemental.

J. Horgan: I thank the hon. Minister of Energy, but what we object to is profits from a public resource....

Interjections.

J. Horgan: Profits....

Wait for it. Bring it on. Bring it on.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

J. Horgan: When the knuckle-draggers are finished, hon. Speaker.

What we object to....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Member, just wait.

Members from the government side, let's listen to the question.

J. Horgan: What we object to is profits from a public resource being reinvested in South Africa, in India and not in Kitimat where the Industrial Development Act says it should be.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Member, just wait. Just take your seat.

Government members, please. Let's listen to the question.

Member, proceed.

J. Horgan: Thank you, hon. Speaker.

That 1,000-percent profit that's going to a company based in Montreal is going to produce new aluminium smelters to compete with Alcan in other jurisdictions around the world. I don't know why that won't get into the thick skulls on the other side.

My specific question on a supplemental speaks to the agreement that the minister just spoke to. In a letter dated November 10, the B.C. Utilities Commission wrote to B.C. Hydro and said the following: "Given the complexity of the agreements filed in this proceeding, B.C. Hydro ought to have provided more than 60 days to review the energy supply contracts." Ought to have provided more than 60 days.

My question is to the minister. You signed an order-in-council on the tenth of November jamming this through. The people in Kitimat, the people of British Columbia have no say in money going offshore to compete with our own smelter in Kitimat. What's the deal?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Government members, we want to listen to the answer now.

Hon. R. Neufeld: I guess the reality is starting to show through to the public. I've heard other MLAs on the opposite side of the House say that private industry doesn't create jobs and wealth. Now we have the Energy critic saying that profit is not acceptable in British Columbia. Well, I tell him: that's the difference between that side of the House and this side of the House.

[1500]

Secondly, I look at a map in my mind, and I don't know about profits going offshore when they're going to Quebec. Interesting.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members, members.

Hon. R. Neufeld: The other thing that we're well aware of on this side of the House is that we actually use the BCUC. We actually empowered the BCUC, unlike the member over there, when he was an adviser, who actually bypassed the BCUC at all times.

I want to tell you that what has happened is that there is a deal between Alcan and B.C. Hydro to pur-

chase electricity for use inside of British Columbia borders and for British Columbians which is clean, green electricity — something we should all be proud of, not talking about profit.

[End of question period.]

Petitions

M. Sather: I have a petition from 1,259 residents calling on government to move the Abernathy connector and Formosa Nursery in my constituency a mere 35 metres to save this viable organic blueberry farm.

Standing Order 35

C. James: I rise under Standing Order 35 to seek leave to move a motion that this House do now adjourn for the purpose of discussing a matter of urgent public importance — namely, the need to send a clear unanimous message from this House to the government of Canada that British Columbia supports the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. We demand the government of Canada support the declaration at the United Nations vote tomorrow in New York.

Debate of this issue is of immediate concern. The declaration is scheduled to be voted on by the third committee of the United Nations tomorrow. Sadly, our federal government has decided to join a small minority among world nations who will vote against the declaration. Our country was one of the driving forces that led to the drafting of this declaration, and now, to our collective shame, Canada has become the driving force against it.

This declaration is enormously important to first nations people — a sign that the government finally gets it. British Columbia's aboriginal leaders have spoken strongly in favour of the declaration. According to Ed John: "This is a historic document for all indigenous people, and there is tremendous support for the adoption of the declaration. However, there is a real sense of betrayal with Canada's complete reversal of their historic leadership position of support."

Shawn Atleo: "Canada's position is not substantiated nor supported by international or domestic law. Canada is going against the grain, as many states are providing solid support for the declaration."

Stewart Phillip: "Since the federal election, Canada's discriminatory actions against indigenous people at the national and international level have been shameful and disgraceful. As a member of the Human Rights Council, Canada accepted responsibility to uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights."

In light of the Premier's very public declarations of support for a change in attitude towards first nations and in light of the declaration's importance, I call on this House to unanimously endorse a motion of support for the UN declaration. I'm providing you with a written statement of this matter and now do therefore move the following motion.

Hon. M. de Jong: Let me make the following submissions in reply to the Leader of the Opposition's submissions to the House and thank her for her comments earlier.

First of all, I must make this observation that there is a certain irony in the fact that the Leader of the Opposition would make the comments she has today, some 48 or 72 hours after essentially criticizing the Premier for fulfilling a commitment to meet with the Assembly of First Nations today, as he is in Vancouver.

It was that very Leader of the Opposition and her caucus who were chastising the Premier and playing politics with his....

Interjections.

[1505]

Mr. Speaker: Members, members.
To the motion.

Hon. M. de Jong: Yeah, thanks, Mr. Speaker, and I know the truth hurts. We are all bound by comments that we have made earlier. In any event, the Premier is meeting with the Assembly of First Nations.

The question for the Speaker to consider today is whether or not the application that the Leader of the Opposition has made falls within the ambit of the rules in Standing Order 35. I will make the same observation today that I have made on two previous occasions. It is not simply a matter of deeming something to be of importance and of interest, which the question undoubtedly is. What the Leader of the Opposition is saying, by virtue of her commentary and submission to the House today, is, "I don't want to deal firstly with the matter that has brought the House back" — that is, the appointment of the commissioner, the child and youth commissioner.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Member.

Hon. M. de Jong: The submissions from Yale-Lillooet are always helpful, even when they contradict themselves.

It is implicit in the submission that the Leader of the Opposition has made today that she believes this is of more importance than the matter which actually precipitated the House being called together. I disagree, and I would urge the Speaker to disagree as well. It does not displace the matter which has brought us here, and that is the adoption of the unanimous recommendation, which the government does intend to call in short order.

Beyond that, I would call.... Having done this now three days in a row, I actually expected someone within the opposition research department to assist folks like the Leader of the Opposition, who make these submissions, to point out to the Chair how it is that the application fits within Standing Order 35, because clearly it doesn't. The reason they don't make those submissions is that it doesn't.

The question is not the urgency of the matter. It is the urgency of debate in this chamber. That principle has been enumerated in the *Parliamentary Practices* time and time again, and the Leader of the Opposition simply chooses to ignore that fact.

I am not in any way disputing, as I did on previous days, the importance of the matter and the interest that people have in the matter. But the question is whether or not it should displace what we have been scheduled to discuss. As I say, the test is not the urgency of the matter but the urgency of debate.

I would suggest to you, hon. Speaker, that a matter that falls outside of the jurisdiction of this chamber — insofar as it is a matter engaging the federal government via our relationship with the United Nations — is also something that you may wish to take into consideration when presenting your ruling.

So whilst, as I said previously, I appreciate the fact that members have interest in these matters and that they are of importance, in this case it does not take precedence, in our view, over the matter that has brought us to this House today. By the way, Mr. Speaker, this government and this Premier do not need to be lectured to by anyone about the importance we attach to our relationship with our first nations. We stand....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.
Continue.

Hon. M. de Jong: This Premier stands at the hallmark of having led this province to a new relationship with its first nations, having embraced and acted in a tangible way to enshrine the principle of reconciliation and mutual respect. Mr. Speaker, for the reasons that I've enumerated and enunciated today, I would submit to you that the application from the opposition leader should fail.

Mr. Speaker: I'll take it under advisement.

[1510]

C. James: It's very clear in listening to the House Leader in his close that, in fact, he was making the case for the urgent debate of this motion, Mr. Speaker, because the vote tomorrow is at the United Nations. I think it's very important that we're actually on record in British Columbia as having a position on this critical issue to show our support. I'm very disappointed that the House Leader chose this opportunity to play politics with a very important issue that in fact...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

C. James: ...was raised because of the urgency and because of the importance of taking this on. There is more than ample time in the legislative calendar to be

able to debate this and the motion that's important on the children's advocate.

Mr. Speaker: I'll take the motion under advisement.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: I call Motion 72, the adoption of the report from the Special Committee to Appoint the Representative for Children and Youth.

Motions on Notice

ADOPTION OF REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO APPOINT A REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

J. Rustad: I move:

[That the Report of the Special Committee to Appoint a Representative for Children and Youth for the Second Session of the Thirty-eighth Parliament be adopted.]

I'd like to start by thanking the Clerk of Committees, Craig James, as well as our research analyst, Wynne MacAlpine. The work of the Clerk's office and the work of those individuals, in terms of moving this committee forward and the other three committees that I've had the honour to chair, have been outstanding. I just wanted to start by thanking them for that work and for that support.

I'd also like to thank the committee members for their hard work in helping to bring forward this recommendation and making this exciting opportunity in the province become a reality.

Mr. Speaker, this report constitutes the unanimous recommendation for the appointment of the first Representative for Children and Youth of British Columbia. The committee is very pleased to recommend Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond to the House.

The committee thanks the many individuals who applied for the position of the Representative for Children and Youth. As we have noted in a report to the House, those individuals serve children and youth in almost every sector — in education, social work, medicine, law and public administration, just to name a few. The range of their experience has reminded us that it does take all of society to support the children and their families. We are especially grateful to the committee of professionals who have dedicated themselves to this work.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond is a leader in that community. For more than 24 years she has worked to address the problems facing the child welfare system at the root causes. As a lawyer, professor of law and author she has worked to strengthen the self-determination rights of the aboriginal people and to restore the strength of aboriginal women and their families and communities.

As a judge she has been an outspoken advocate for services to assist youth in the justice system, particularly sexually exploited youth and youth disabled by

fetal alcohol spectrum disorders. In every capacity Ms. Lafond has welcomed the responsibility that comes by default to people in authority. That is the responsibility to set an example for young people.

I'd like to close by taking this opportunity to quote a line from the report about Ms. Lafond, because it summarizes why this appointment is so important: "What became evident in our discussions was that Ms. Lafond also meets a need that we didn't explicitly identify — hope."

Unfortunately, Ms. Lafond cannot be here with us today. Weather problems have kept her grounded in Saskatchewan, but I look forward to introducing her in the House at a later time.

C. James: Mr. Speaker, I'm pleased to stand in support of this motion today. The motion today appoints, as we've heard, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond as the Representative for Children and Youth for the province of British Columbia.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond is a noted aboriginal lawyer and respected legal scholar, whose distinguished career broke new ground for aboriginal people and for aboriginal women in this country. Ms. Turpel-Lafond holds a bachelor's degree from Carleton University, a law degree from Osgoode Law School, a master's in international law from the University of Cambridge and a doctor of law from Harvard Law School.

[1515]

She was the first tenured law professor of aboriginal heritage in Canada. She was also the first aboriginal woman to serve as a Provincial Court judge in Saskatchewan. In 2006 Ms. Turpel-Lafond was awarded the C. Willy Hodgson Award for her work in building bridges between aboriginal and non-aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Ms. Turpel-Lafond's efforts to advance the principles of equity and diversity in the areas of law and justice set her apart from so many. Her passion for justice, her work to bring communities together in the spirit of kindness and respect, and her tireless advocacy for diversity and quality make her the ideal candidate for this position, and I am very proud to support her.

I'm also incredibly proud to see once again an independent officer of the Legislature, a position that will oversee B.C.'s child protection system, and advocate on behalf of our province's most vulnerable children, to correct what many view as this government's biggest mistake. The opposition will be unanimously supporting this motion today, because having a representative for children and youth in our province is the right thing to do, and this position is a huge victory for children in B.C.

This position is a step forward in rebuilding our child protection system, which was wilfully dismantled by this government over the past five years. It's also a strong reminder of the arrogance that has come to characterize this Premier and his government — a government that refused to listen; a government that refused to heed the warning signs; a government that refused to back down, despite mounting evidence that

their approach was just plain wrong; a government that changed course only after the political fire became too hot for them to ignore.

I bring this up because one of our responsibilities as legislators is to examine our history, to look closely at the choices we have made, identify what went wrong and how to fix it, because we can't begin to learn from our mistakes until we acknowledge that what happened was wrong and that it never, ever should be allowed to happen again.

Much of what informs today's motion came long, long before the election of this government. Members on both sides of this House will remember the story of Matthew Vaudreuil, a five-year-old child who died at the hands of his caregiver in 1992. His tragic death prompted a public outcry, followed by a judicial inquiry by Justice Thomas Gove. In his report Judge Gove spoke of Matthew's legacy, of the changes needed in B.C.'s child protection system so that tragedies like Matthew's would never, ever happen again. Chief among them was the need for an independent children's commission. "Children who are affected by administrative decisions need easy access to independent advocacy," he said, "especially when their interests and the interests of their parents or other caregivers differ."

Judge Gove reminded us that protecting vulnerable children is not a partisan issue. It's a fundamental issue of justice. These children deserve an advocate. They deserve a voice. He also reminded us that that advocate must be distinctly independent from government. That advocate must be free to represent the interests of children at risk, to speak for those who cannot speak for themselves.

Some of the members of this House were also sitting members when Judge Gove's recommendations were first debated and implemented. The Premier was one of them. He was the Leader of the Opposition at the time, and he supported every one of the recommendations in the Gove report. He supported the creation of an independent children's commissioner. He demanded that the government of the day act immediately to appoint one. In fact, he spoke passionately about the need to put more resources in the system and to help children at risk.

[1520]

The government of the day implemented Judge Gove's recommendations. They agreed that there needed to be an independent advocate in place to represent the interests of the most vulnerable, and in 1996 the Children's Commission was created. It was an independent body empowered to review all child deaths and critical injuries of children in care in the province of British Columbia. Now — 14 years after that terrible tragedy, 11 years after Judge Gove brought forward his recommendations and ten years after the Children's Commission was created — we stand here today debating a motion to appoint a representative for children and youth to protect B.C.'s most vulnerable.

If that important lesson was learned more than ten years ago, then why are we standing here today? Be-

cause the Premier did not keep his commitment to British Columbians. His actions betrayed the voters of this province and betrayed the children of this province.

The Premier promised to end the chaos and bureaucratic restructuring of the Ministry for Children and Families. He promised to introduce accountability into the child protection system, and he promised to enhance training for front-line workers to protect children at risk. But he didn't follow through on those commitments. If he had, we wouldn't be standing here debating this motion today.

This government, in June 2002, shut down the office of the children's commissioner — one of this government's biggest mistakes. In doing so, the Premier went back on his word and the spirit of the Gove report, which he embraced when he was in opposition. The changes brought forward by this Premier and this government have created a crisis in our child welfare system.

No case better illustrates the severity of that crisis than the case of a 19-month-old girl from Port Alberni who died at the hands of her caregiver. If any case illustrates the need for an independent children's officer, this is it. It showed the systematic crisis and the extreme pressure faced by front-line workers. It showed the serious failing of this government's handling of the Children and Families portfolio, and it showed the dire need to restore an independent watchdog for children. It showed the human impact, most importantly, of this government's reckless cuts and severe mismanagement.

It also showed us, sadly, that the government was more concerned about covering up than getting to the bottom of the problem. It was only after months and months of questioning, of denial, of blaming individuals and social workers, of denying responsibility that this government finally admitted that its choices resulted in chaos for the most vulnerable children — which brings me to the Hughes report and the reason that we're standing here today.

The hon. Ted Hughes conducted an independent review of B.C.'s child welfare system, one of nine reviews launched in this tragic case. Mr. Hughes laid the ultimate responsibility for the problems plaguing our system squarely at the feet of the Premier, because it was the Premier's budget cuts and the Premier's reckless dismantling of our child protection system that was at the heart of the contributing factors that led to this tragic case. Mr. Hughes's number-one recommendation was to restore an independent officer of the Legislature to provide independent oversight to our child welfare system, to provide a voice for children at risk.

While this motion is a huge victory for children, as I said, it was sadly only political expediency that brought us to this point today. It has taken far too long for this government to admit its failure, and their choices put children at risk.

[1525]

The Premier wants British Columbians to believe he's learned his lesson, but when you look at everything that has taken us to this point — relentless ques-

tioning from social workers, from advocates, from the opposition, from the media — British Columbians are really wondering what this government has learned. After five long years of denial, British Columbians don't have a lot of faith that this government can be trusted to do the right thing on their own. This is a government that wants to avoid the tough questions, avoid debate, avoid accountability.

I'd like to reiterate that this appointment is a wonderful victory for children and families in our province. The opposition is incredibly proud of the work that has led to this report and this appointment, and we are going to do everything to ensure the success of this office and of this representative. We will continue to work to address what is left to be done, because there are many other recommendations from the Hughes report that still have to be implemented, including addressing the urgent problems in the Coroners Service.

The opposition will continue to hold the government to account for its cuts to these vital services and supports that have left vulnerable children behind. We will continue to ask the tough questions about this government's record, and we will continue to stand up for the issues facing children in this province: growing child poverty; a lack of affordable, accessible quality child care; growing wait-lists for children with special needs and developmental disabilities.

We will hold this government to account for their choices, because all children in this province deserve an opportunity to thrive. All children in this province deserve a voice. No child should be left behind, and we will fight every single day to ensure that doesn't happen.

M. Karagianis: As Deputy Chair of the hiring committee, I stand today to speak in favour of this motion. I'd first like to echo the comments made by the member for Prince George-Omineca in thanking all of those who participated in the committee and all of the staff support on that. It was a very professional process, and staff was excellent in that.

I think that the member for Victoria-Beacon Hill has talked a little bit about the history of how we got there, and I'd like to touch on that briefly before I talk about the really superior candidate that we are appointing today.

In 1992, as the previous speaker said, Matthew Vaudreuil and the case around his tragic death launched us into the Gove report and, in fact, the inception of the Children's Commission here for British Columbia. The Gove report called on the provincial government to appoint an independent children's commissioner. In fact, the New Democrat government of the day did just that. They set up an independent, open and publicly accountable Children's Commission.

Premier Campbell, then in opposition, said: "Equally importantly, we should have the dollars for children in need in this province. Instead of having a government that continues to try and protect politicians first and bureaucrats second and maybe kids third, if they even get on the list...." I think it's impor-

tant to remember those words, especially as subsequent events unfolded over time.

In the 2001 election Gordon Campbell made the promises to the citizens of British Columbia....

Mr. Speaker: Member, no names, please.

M. Karagianis: I beg your pardon. Premier Campbell made these promises to the citizens of British Columbia. He said: "It's time we put real accountability into the system and devote the resources to the job needed to put the interests of kids first." He said: "We need to make children the number-one priority and devote adequate resources." But the Campbell government did the complete opposite.

[1530]

Mr. Speaker: Member, please take your seat. Just to remind you of using the right parliamentary language and not to reference names in any way, shape or form.

Continue.

M. Karagianis: Thank you very much, hon. Speaker. I will guard my language.

In fact, the provincial government did the very opposite of those things. Once in government, the promise-breaking began early, and it was rigorous. It has continued to affect the lives of families and children in British Columbia until this very day. First came the core review, and the Premier said that all British Columbians would benefit and that there would be better services for children, families and first nations.

In truth, this government laid off hundreds of front-line child protection workers, eliminated internal child protection audits and attempted a vast reconstruction of the system that created chaos in the ministry. In 2001 the Premier said: "The changes may be unsettling for staff and people who rely on government programs, but all British Columbians are going to benefit from an examination of government and government services to determine what government can do best and what government should be doing."

With that, this government launched massive budget cuts and full-scale restructuring, after promising the very opposite and flying in the face of the advice of all experts who warned against trying to do both at the same time. By January 2002 the Premier said that he had no hesitation about cutting jobs, eliminating programs and closing jails and courthouses. A month later the government announced a 23-percent cut to the Ministry of Children and Family Development — \$360 million.

The Premier said he had a better plan to reduce children in care and to save money. Instead, the axe fell on the Children's Commission and the act and the Child, Youth and Family Advocacy Act as well. The minister responsible at the time called the elimination of the Children's Commission a good-news day for protection of kids at risk. I'll repeat that, actually. The minister of the day in government said the elimination of the children's commissioner was a good-news day

for the protection of children at risk in British Columbia.

The commission had made public more than 769 child and youth fatality reports during the six-year period in which it operated. The coroner's office, staggering under its own budget cuts of 15 percent, was handed responsibility for child death reviews, despite the Premier's comments in opposition in 1996 that the coroner is no substitute for reviews. In truth, since that transfer in September of 2002 the Coroners Service has released just one public report. The B.C. Liberals' child and youth officer was mandated to investigate deaths only when asked to do so by the Attorney General.

Next, the Premier turned his focus on aboriginal services. He announced a historic plan to reduce the number of native youths in foster care, but he admitted there would be no new money allocated to accomplish that. We'll talk more about that promise shortly as well.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

A year later, this government had to admit that their planned cuts would put vulnerable children at risk, so the government only cut the budget by 11 percent, eliminating 525 employees, including 130 front-line workers. As the Premier reminded reporters in his year-end interviews, the cuts made in 2002 were just the first round of a three-year plan. There seemed to be little connection between the government's budget objective and its child care policy. When the cuts added up, people could see that one would not support the other.

The tragedy of the child's death in Port Alberni would shine a light on just how deplorable this situation had become. As the story unfolded, the government failings spoke volumes: the budget cuts, the chaotic restructuring, the lack of resources and guidelines, the complete lack of government leadership. In the fall of 2005 both the opposition and Gove himself called for the Children's Commission to be reinstated in the wake of the Port Alberni child's death.

[1535]

In addition, the discovery of hundreds of unfinished child death reviews, shoved into storage and forgotten by the Coroners Service forced the Premier to admit there clearly had been a bit of a problem. But the Premier blamed it on systemic breakdown and denied that his budget cuts or restructuring had anything to do with it.

The NDP opposition and the Leader of the Opposition continued to call on the government to reinstate the Children's Commission and to provide adequate funding for child services. Under the onslaught of the opposition, the government eventually, after dodging and dancing and attempting in every possible way to avoid admitting responsibility for the chaos in MCFD, had to announce a total of nine reviews to try and mitigate the situation. At the end, Judge Ted Hughes was finally appointed to investigate the circumstances around the Port Alberni child's death.

The Hughes report, released in April of 2006, was openly critical of the way the Liberal government han-

dled the Ministry of Children and Family Development over the past five years. As Mr. Hughes said: "I cannot agree with the Premier's earlier assessment that budget cuts did not contribute to the failure of the transition process or that the transition provisions of the new act constituted a clear plan for the transfer of death review functions."

The report by Mr. Ted Hughes makes 62 recommendations to the government, many of them directly reflecting the briefing note that was sent to the Hughes commission by the New Democrats.

The number-one recommendation of the Hughes report is for the establishment of an independent children's representative for B.C. So here we are all these years later — five years of cuts and chaos, public outcry, cover-ups — and we have come full circle right back to where we were at the beginning — same recommendations, same criteria for a children's representative.

But in the past five years many other things have changed. Now every month in this province over 2,400 children access a food bank. Homelessness has become epidemic. In 2005 in the GVRD the total number of homeless people almost doubled and included 40 families with children. In Victoria more than 700 were homeless in 2005, including 41 families and 78 children. Those numbers have grown considerably, even in the last year.

In Penticton recently I spent two days going to the Liberal convention. Standing in front of the convention centre was a young woman and her son. It was a bitterly cold morning. I approached the woman because she had a huge placard that talked about the fact that she was going to be homeless in a few days, without help. As it turned out, I was the only person attending that convention that stopped to talk to that woman. Her name was Carmen Caruso, and she and her three children were in fear of being homeless. But no one would stop to talk to that woman except me, the observer at that convention.

British Columbia has nearly one of every four children in the province living in poverty. Census figures show that aboriginal children have a poverty rate that is almost twice as large as that of non-aboriginal children. The vast majority of poor children in British Columbia live in families with an income — children of the working poor, also a new demographic here in British Columbia in the last number of years. In a time of economic prosperity many children and families are clearly being left behind.

Against this new reality, this backdrop, a candidate has come forward who so exemplifies the Hughes vision and who so epitomizes the committee's expectations that unanimity from our committee was quick and fairly painless, considering it's an all-party committee. Judge Turpel-Lafond not only brings remarkable credentials and extraordinary life experience, she demonstrated throughout the interviews her own compelling vision of what she saw happening with the children's representative position. In fact, I have great confidence that in British Columbia we are about to experience a profound change.

[1540]

But where do we go from here? What can we hope for from this new position? What wish list can we in the opposition offer? Well, I think we can offer a few wishes.

First, I'd like to actually talk about a young woman from Quesnel by the name of Kayla O'Flynn. In January of 2002 Kayla O'Flynn, a young teen, was diagnosed with a progressive neuromuscular disorder. Her condition began to deteriorate, and eventually her family had to go to the Children and Families Ministry looking for support. But in fact, their timing could not have been worse because against the unfolding events of the Campbell government cuts...

K. Krueger: Here we go again.

M. Karagianis: Sorry, I beg your pardon.

...against the unfolding events of the government's cuts and restructuring, this child and her family were let down by the system.

Kayla was age 14 at the time. She was denied at-home services because she could feed herself despite her condition. Kayla couldn't actually walk to the table to get her food, but she could lift a spoon to her mouth so she was considered not qualified for at-home services.

What Kayla actually needed, and what her therapist recommended as her condition deteriorated, was a power wheelchair so that she could get around, so she could get to the table to get the food to feed herself. But that was denied to her.

Her condition continued to deteriorate, and over the next three years Kayla's family continued to appeal and sought time after time to get a power wheelchair for their daughter. But of course, this was all being played out at a time when government was restructuring and there were budget cuts. In early 2005 the Ministry of Children and Families did grant her medical benefits and therapy but no power wheelchair.

Then in June of 2005 she received a letter saying that all responsibilities for the developmentally challenged were being shifted to CLBC, a new entity created by the government. She applied there, but still got no power wheelchair. In June of 2005 Kayla ended up in the hospital as her health continued to deteriorate, still with no power wheelchair.

Eighteen months after requests, appeals and therapist recommendations that this is what she needed, this young woman died from her condition without ever receiving a power wheelchair. Several weeks after her death the family received confirmation that their request had finally been approved. This young woman and her family lived in Quesnel.

If there had been a children's representative in place for Kayla, well, I think we can all guess that she might have got her power wheelchair so that the last 18 months of her life would have been better. She would have had more dignity, and she would have been able to get to the table to feed herself.

CLBC was started under a cloud and has been plagued with problems ever since.

Jan Morrison-Hines is a young mother who lives in Smithers. She has a 14-year-old son, non-verbal, who suffers from autism. Jan Morrison-Hines does not access any services from government other than some diapers for her son through the at-home program. Her son requires up to 16 diapers a day, and she is his sole caregiver.

When the budget cuts came, Jan was told that her son could only have eight diapers a day. Of course, her son broke out in a rash. Her doctor went with the mother and appealed this decision by the government, and then Jan was told that her son could have 12 diapers a day. But in fact, every three months Jan Morrison-Hines has to reappeal with a letter from her doctor or else she'll have her number of diapers reduced to eight a day.

[1545]

I would say to you and to the new children's commissioner: what kind of mean-spirited government restricts the number of diapers that you can put on your child every day? I would hope that this is a case that our new children's representative will take on, and I will certainly be urging her to do that.

Kathleen Moore is another mother who has been denied adequate services for her daughter because her condition does not fit within a fairly narrow description of the kind of autism that's supported. She only receives half the funding that an autistic child would get. Kathleen Moore is very concerned because her daughter could end up in the justice system without adequate supports and care. So I'm hoping that Kathleen Moore and her daughter will be a case that the new children's representative will take on.

Deputy Speaker: Member, please make all your comments through the Chair.

M. Karagianis: Yes, I will.

Those are only a couple of many, many stories right now of families being told to come up with a plan under Community Living B.C. They sit down and do a plan for their children, and then they are being told that there's no funding. There's no respite care for their children. There are no intakes being done. They can't have enough diapers for their children.

Community Living B.C., a huge responsibility under the Ministry of Children and Family Development, appears to have no funding left only partway through their fiscal year. I will certainly be talking with the new children's representative to look into that, to find out why this aspect of ministry care has been so vastly underfunded that they are telling people they can't have diapers when they need them.

I'd like to go back to earlier in my speech when I commented about the Premier's comments and promise about aboriginal services. He said he had a historical plan to reduce the number of native youths in foster care, but he said there was no money allocated to accomplish that and that there would be better services for children, families and first nations.

Unfortunately, absent today in the gallery because of the weather are a number of representatives from

the Stó:lō tribal council who were here last week. They meant to be here today, but certainly the weather has prevented them from doing that. This community has been pleading with government to address their issues and to provide leadership to them because the transition of authority has not gone well for the Stó:lō community, and the funding has not gone smoothly for the Stó:lō community. A schism has resulted in their community, which is leaving their children and families at great risk.

It is an unacceptable situation. It is my sincere hope that the new children's representative will see their case and will take it on and that she will urge government to take the leadership that's required there to help mend the rift in that community and to help provide the adequate services they so justly deserve and want.

It's foster care inequities, underfunding, recruitment and retention problems from a government that cut birthday and Christmas gifts to foster children, thereby discouraging foster parents who want to build a quality of life for the children in their care and are being denied by a mean-spirited and unkind government the kind of quality service that they would like to provide for those children.

Children in the home of a relative. Now, in fact, that's excluded from the mandate of the Representative for Children and Youth. That's too bad, because they will be unable to turn to this new representative for advice, for advocacy, for support, because children who live in the home of a relative are not paid to the same degree as children who live in other kinds of foster care. So while families struggle to provide adequate care while fostering members of their own family, they are treated unfairly and differently by this government.

[1550]

I know for a fact that Ms. Turpel-Lafond has a particular interest in children with FASD. I know that that will be one area where she is going to concentrate. In fact, currently there is a huge inadequacy in the system and in the support services for those with FASD. There is an abnormally large impact on the youth justice system of young people — young aboriginal people often — with FASD, who are being treated as criminals when they should be given support systems for their health conditions.

I also have faith that Ms. Turpel-Lafond is going to look into issues around justice for girls, ongoing concerns that they have about the safety of young girls within the judicial system. I recently toured the youth facility in Prince George, and, in fact, as with many of the other facilities here, there is an overrepresentation of aboriginal youth in those facilities and an overrepresentation of children with FASD.

There's a high rate of aboriginal youth suicides here in British Columbia among aboriginal youth aged ten to 19 years. The suicide rate is five to six times higher than for non-aboriginal populations. I know that that will be a particular concern for the children's representative in finding ways to reach out and provide better services to those communities.

Youth agreements in this province have become a one-way ticket for young people to be sent living on

their own at an early age, often with catastrophic results. Many of them end up on the streets. Many of them end up on the east side of Vancouver because, in fact, they are given inadequate funding, inadequate supports, and at a very early age of 15 or 16 are sent to live on their own. It's certainly more cost-effective for government but is tragic for the young people in this province who are experiencing youth agreements. I know for a fact that Ms. Turpel-Lafond will take that on as a special interest.

Transition to adulthood for all children with special needs, autism, the developmentally challenged. This government has a policy that you may have been autistic until you were 19, but the day you turn 19, you are now a consenting adult, free to make your own decisions. You are given funding and sent on your way. If you have an IQ over 70, all your other pre-existing conditions become immaterial, and you are often deemed to be capable of living on your own. All programs and supports are abandoned.

Parents with grave concerns are complaining all over this province about children who continue to need supports. For the same reason they needed them before their 19th birthday, they need them after their 19th birthday.

We talked earlier about the Coroners Service. The Coroners Service was never funded to a level that would permit it to fulfil the responsibilities it was given in 2002 for the child death reviews. This is an important component of the new children's representative in their job. In fact, this is a significant part of the job. Perhaps one-third of their duties will be around child death reviews.

To this date the 955 lost files still have not been reviewed or released in this House. I realize this is not necessarily the job of the new child representative, but it is the job of this government and for the families who are still waiting to hear. I heard the Solicitor General say the other day that these reviews were going to be released. I sure hope so. I expect the new children's representative will probably have some curiosity around that as well.

The Morley report, released just weeks ago, shows a complete breakdown in communications between the Coroners Service, MCFD and aboriginal agencies. Although I do not expect the children's representative to dig back into history around either the 955 death review files or perhaps as far back as the case around the child's death in Port Alberni, I do hope and believe that this new person will want to closely examine all the reports and documents, like the Morley report of September 29, in order to solve some of the outstanding issues and seek answers to the questions arising from these reports, because of course in many ways that will shape where she goes in the future.

Of course, we have the Hughes recommendations. Again, I know that Ms. Turpel-Lafond's understanding and knowledgeable approach to the report is such that she'll be moving forward on those recommendations. She spoke very eloquently of that during the interview.

[1555]

I am thrilled that we have a strong, energetic visionary to take on these daunting challenges here in British Columbia. I believe from her credentials that Ms. Turpel-Lafond is more than capable and may in fact take us far beyond where we expected to go. You only need to spend a few minutes in the room listening to this woman talk to know that she is a very powerful presence. I suspect she's going to put British Columbia far beyond anything we might have expected or planned for.

In fact, there may be many surprises in this House in the days to come. I'm happy to offer my support and join with the Leader of the Opposition in saying that we unanimously support the motion to approve Ms. Turpel-Lafond.

N. Simons: It gives me great pleasure to stand and put my support behind this unanimous choice of the committee for Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond as the first Representative for Children and Youth. When I heard her quoted as saying that this was the best job in Canada, I thought we picked the right person. I used to think that to be the Minister of Children and Family Development was the best job, but if it's the representative who chooses that to be the title of hers, I'm glad. She's obviously got the enthusiasm, the qualifications and the integrity that have been sorely lacking in the ministry and in this government.

I just have to say that on a personal note, this represents a day that is the end of a chapter, in a way. In fact, I think that the events of September 2002, culminating in today, are a sorry chapter for the government, a sorry chapter for the ministry and a very sad — in fact, tragic — chapter for the people of Ahousat and Nuu-chah-nulth. My thoughts and feelings of goodwill are with them.

I think it would be important to remind ourselves why or how we got here. We did not get here because of government's great desire to have an independent representative oversee their ministry. We didn't get here just because Judge Hughes recommended we have an independent reviewer.

The committee made a selection. The committee made a good selection. We're here partly because of that selection. I'm glad to say that the Legislature is unanimous in the support of that selection.

But we're actually here because of what happened not just in 2001, with the core review, but the subsequent gutting of the programs for children and vulnerable children — aboriginal children included — which occurred in the months that followed. Budget cuts in the area of 23 percent were shocking to the employees and, I think, to the management of the ministry at the time.

When I got a phone call in September of 2002 saying, "Nick, we've had a tragedy, and we need someone to come and look into it," I said: "Why are you picking me?" They said: "Well, you're the first person on the list that both parties could agree to." I said: "Well, I hope it wasn't too far down the list."

As it turns out, I was chosen, perhaps, because of some brave person in the ministry who knew that I'd

be objective, that I'd look at ways of improving the system and that I wouldn't simply say: "This individual made a mistake. That individual made a mistake. Ultimately, the uncle is the one who should be held responsible."

We're here partly because this government decided to offer an award to the ministry that could cut regulations as quickly as possible, and that included the Ministry of Children and Family Development — the proud winners of the deregulation sprint award. Cutting out regulations that make sure you check out a home before you place a vulnerable child in there, before you place a child who has absolutely no adult figure looking after their best interests....

When you cut rules about placing a child in a home like that, that's the wrong kind of deregulation. That's not red tape. That's protecting the vulnerable children of this province. This government failed.

[1600]

The kith-and-kin program was introduced — as you know, I said it was introduced rapidly and without adequate thought — ostensibly for the first nations and aboriginal communities of this province. Why, then, were they not consulted once on the implementation of this new piece of legislation?

The Premier said that it wasn't to save money and that it wasn't necessarily to reduce the number of children in care. The kith-and-kin program, as the public now knows, was purely an exercise in reducing costs to government and to make the number of children in care officially go down without really having an impact on children at all. As you know, children who are in kith and kin are not considered in care.

The Premier said: "I want child welfare decisions to be made openly so that you can see why those decisions are being made and can hold us to account." It took over four years to hold this government to account on its incredible failure of 2001 and 2002. That's not openness. That's not accountability.

I wrote a report that was ready in August of 2003 with 21 recommendations, including the 12 that were ultimately left in the report after the cutting that it underwent. We're here because the government could influence an internal review process so that important facts were deliberately held from the public.

There's another reason, besides the abject failure of this government to operate the ministry properly. We've realized that under this system, the current system — the best place to live since 2001 — government is in fact unable to look at itself objectively. This government's response to the report that was released, condemning it for the actions that it took, was itself taken to task.

Who did the government ask to review the reviewer? Somebody they hired, an officer for children and youth in B.C., held by a person who was primarily responsible for the core review of 2001. I would suggest that it's inappropriate for government to hire somebody in government to investigate itself, particularly when the "itself" was responsible for the cuts that took place in the ministry.

The changes in the terms of reference were reviewed. The delay in the report was reviewed and every single time — surprise, surprise — had nothing really to do beyond little organizational problems due to some budget cuts.

They decided to change their focus and question the validity of the report. Well, the validity of the report stands for itself. Twelve recommendations out of 12 were implemented. Other ones came, emerging out of other reports that were subsequently released, almost verbatim from the original report of 2003. I don't think the public of British Columbia accepts that from a government that claims to be open and accountable.

This brings us to the question: how will having an independent representative actually help us? I think that if we had had one in 2001, they would have said: "Excuse me. Those kinds of cuts will have a serious negative impact on children in this province. Don't implement that program so quickly, because you haven't got guidelines. You haven't had training. You haven't figured out where that particular program stands in legislation. No social worker has ever done one of those."

It wouldn't have looked very good on this government to see that the first time they implement a kith-and-kin program, it results in the death of a child. They didn't foresee that, because they didn't plan ahead because they weren't managing properly. Child welfare deserves more than policy written on the side of a desk.

The representative will help children. The representative will be the voice those children can't have. The voices of social workers are stifled, but the voice of the independent representative will not be. The representative will say: "Don't cut programs that help families look after their own children. That would be inappropriate. We want children to stay with their families. We should be putting money into those programs."

[1605]

It will help youth who think that maybe after being in care for 16 years of their life, they should have more than just a handshake and a pat on the head, saying: "Good luck to you." It should be more than that. It'll help families. It'll help foster parents. It'll help grandmothers and grandfathers look after their kids. It's a special day. It's a good day. It's a good day that we are all here speaking in favour of the appointment of the person who will correct the many wrongs that have taken place since 2001.

Let me just end on what I would consider Ted Hughes's other most important recommendation, recommendation 12. Recommendation 12 reads that the provincial and federal governments, in collaboration with aboriginal communities, begin to work toward the fulfilment of the commitments of the Kelowna accord by assessing the health, economic and social needs of aboriginal communities, including the urban off-reserve population.

This comes right back down to the essential element which underscores all of this. That is the abject poverty into which first nations children are born and raised. We have all failed; we've all failed in the past. We have an opportunity to say, once and for all, that

investment in child protection should be made at the beginning of the children's lives so that they're not going to school hungry after being kept up at night because of fighting, because of violence, because of alcohol and drug abuse. These are the children who would end up not doing well in school, dropping out of school.

I think the representative's role will be to advocate for those children. She knows them, I know them, and I am so pleased to say that I am thrilled that this sad chapter in the history of British Columbia's child welfare system will be over and that we'll have a truly independent voice for children in B.C.

D. Thorne: I rise today to speak in favour of this motion. For the past year and a half I've had the pleasure of serving on the legislative committee that has been responsible for several appointments of independent officers of this Legislature. We have interviewed and hired many excellent candidates, and the appointment of the new children's representative is no exception.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond is of such a high calibre that I'm not only proud to be part of her appointment, but I feel very hopeful as well. I feel hopeful especially for the children of British Columbia, because this is a chance for a new beginning. It is a chance to reverse this government's legacy of cuts, chaos and harm to B.C.'s most vulnerable children and families — a chance to say for the first time in six years that vulnerable children and their families really do matter.

The NDP opposition opposed this government's elimination of the Children's Commission and the deep cuts to the ministry back in the early 2000s. When the minister responsible for eliminating the Children's Commission actually called the elimination of the independent office a good-news day for the protection of kids at risk, opposition MLAs warned this government that they were placing budget cutting above the safety of children and that the Premier and his government would live to regret eliminating independent oversight of this ministry.

The opposition MLAs called on the government to reinstate the children's commissioner and to provide adequate funding for children's services. During the 2005 election the NDP platform pledged additional resources for the Ministry of Children and Family Development and also the restoration of the office of the children's commissioner. Since May 2005 the renewed NDP opposition has continually highlighted the serious failures in this government's handling of the Children and Families portfolio and the dire need to restore an independent watchdog and advocate for children, finally forcing an admission from the Premier and his government that first-term budget cuts did in fact hurt children, hurt child protection and especially hurt services to children and families.

[1610]

Now, because of this continued political heat, we finally can stand here today and unanimously recommend a new child representative. In spite of people

maybe saying that we've had it before or whatever, this is indeed a huge step forward. I believe that we have finally, as a government — both sides of this Legislature now, which is really important — admitted that this is an office that must be filled and must be there for the children of British Columbia.

Even with this unanimous motion, I believe this government still can't fully be trusted when it comes to our vulnerable children and families in British Columbia. Just very briefly I'll mention a couple of things. B.C. has had the highest rate of child poverty in Canada for a couple of years now, and we can say that we still are winning today, because all the new statistics have just come out.

Families and children in this province, as we all know, face increasing risk of homelessness. Housing is at an all-time low. We are finding that we do not have any subsidized housing anymore. Our waiting list has grown to 14,000. Almost half of food bank recipients in British Columbia are children, and food banks are a really new growth industry, if we want to talk about growth industries.

Also, I would like to add that I believe this appointment and other key Hughes recommendations should have been and could have been implemented before today, almost the end of November. Just because we have this motion, I don't think it means that this opposition is finished looking at this government and holding it accountable for leaving vulnerable children and their families behind — and not letting that happen again in the future.

That being said, I want to rise above this and speak about my pride in being part of this unanimous decision and this wonderful candidate and in the fact that we are turning over a new leaf today in British Columbia. I think the future is hopeful not just for the vulnerable families but especially for the children. I think we should all be very proud that our work has led to this unanimous report and to this appointment.

I can tell you that my side of the House will work very hard to ensure the success of this office, and I hope that you can say the same, Mr. Speaker.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

A. Dix: It's a great honour to rise in this debate today, first of all, to express my appreciation to all the members of the special committee that worked this fall and made such an outstanding recommendation. Clearly, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond will be an outstanding representative for children in British Columbia.

I want to acknowledge the work of my colleague from Esquimalt-Metchosin, my colleague from Coquitlam-Maillardville, the member for Prince George-Omineca and members on the other side of the House for their work on this committee. It is important work because it is an important role, and it's one that people in British Columbia have fought hard for over the last few years — to see this day arrive, a day when we have the

appointment of a new Representative for Children and Youth in British Columbia, when we have an outstanding voice who will speak up independently on behalf of children, particularly those children who don't ordinarily have a voice in the debate.

The report of the committee emphasizes to me the importance of the work that's been done by many people in the last little while. We heard from the member for Powell River-Sunshine Coast, who spoke in this debate. He, like many other social workers, has shown remarkable courage and remarkable leadership in speaking out when he needed to speak out.

One of the reasons why we need independent voices and independent commissioners is the issue around confidentiality. It's why it's so important that we have such a distinguished legal scholar and fighter for children being appointed to this position. The importance of confidentiality in the case of children has been illustrated, in fact, by what's happened in British Columbia over the last few years.

[1615]

What's happened in British Columbia over the last few years is that children, particularly children in care and children known to the ministry — who are, it's fair to say, the most vulnerable people in society, who don't have a voice in public debate — have suffered some of the worst cuts and some of the worst actions by government that we have seen in decades in British Columbia.

At the same time, what we saw in this period was the elimination of just those independent voices who could access the confidential information, who could access the cases and who could in fact speak as a voice. What we had was the confidentiality designed to protect children used to protect those who cut services to children. That is why it is so important today that we are naming a new Representative for Children and Youth.

And you see this. If anyone has ever done a freedom-of-information request to the Ministry of Children and Families, you see this, even in issues where the Ministry of Children and Families has clearly failed. The confidentiality which is intended to protect children is in fact used to protect those who have not done what they needed to do.

The seriousness of this issue you can see in the recent report by the child and youth officer with respect to the case of Jamie Charlie. That case shows us very profoundly where you have individuals who have very senior places in this province not seemingly understanding their fundamental role — the fundamental role each citizen has to report threats to children. This is what happens. This is what happens when you don't have independent voices with access raising issues like this.

This is one of the things that we hope to change, and one of the things we have to do today as we approve this appointment is commit ourselves to providing the new representative with the resources and tools that she needs — for example, the resources and tools of her office, which we vote every year. We have to

commit ourselves to providing adequate and appropriate resources. We have to commit ourselves to providing adequate and appropriate resources for social workers. We have to commit ourselves to address the challenges of transition facing many people in community living. We have to commit ourselves to providing resources to young people and youth on youth agreements. It's a forgotten fact that — serious as the cuts were to young children — the actual brunt, the monetary brunt of the cuts that this government brought forward to children and youth, happened to youth from 12 to 19.

I think we have a sense from the work that the new representative Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond has done that she will be very much engaged in the issue of cuts to youth, because those are issues of great importance in our province.

Hon. Speaker, I think as we go forward, we have to commit ourselves to those things. We also have to commit ourselves because all of us know that in the debate on the legislation where we created this office in May — and now we're taking that legislation forward to the next logical step and appointing the representative — we acted very hastily in a sense. The ministry had to draft that legislation quickly and did draft that legislation quickly, but clearly there are significant areas where we have to ensure that the new representative has the appropriate tools to do the job properly.

I'm thinking, for example, of a program that the Minister of Children and Families, the Solicitor General and the Minister of Agriculture will know, which is the Child in the Home of a Relative program. With 4,719 children in that program, I think it's fair to say that the support we give to children in that program is completely inadequate. As of now that program, which is an important program that affects many people in the MCFD system, should be reviewed and should be under the purview of the child representative, and that program is not.

We have to commit as legislators to give the new representative the statutory authority and the financial authority to do her job. That's part of our commitment when we stand today, when we all stand today as members of this Legislature and approve this nomination, approve the new representative. We have to, when we stand, think about what we need to do next, which is provide her with the resources, provide the ministry with the resources and, most importantly, provide children with the resources they need — especially children in care and children known to the ministry. We have to do all of those things.

[1620]

Hon. Speaker, I just want to say, as we come close to wrapping up this debate, how proud I am of the people of British Columbia for fighting for children that they don't know. We have heard voices — and I have heard voices as I've gone around British Columbia — of ordinary people who may not know many of the children in care they've spoken out for but have said again and again and said to the government that it was wrong to get rid of an independent children's

commissioner. They spoke out and said that they wanted this day to happen, and they were going to fight for it. We've heard their voices, and their voices have been heard.

I want to thank social workers who said that this day was an important day and stood up, sometimes at risk of their jobs, and said no to this government. They said that we must have an independent commissioner back, and we must reverse the cuts that were made to the Ministry of Children and Families. I want to thank them.

I want to thank courageous people who had so much at stake. I think of Harvey and Rose Charlie, who spoke up in this debate. They personally had a lot at stake. They had personal issues to expose, and they rose beyond that and spoke up for all the other children — not just the children in their family but all the children of British Columbia.

There is a huge weight on the new child representative, but that weight should not be just borne by her. It should be borne by every one of us. This action today has to be followed up by action every day. The fate and the future of children in care, of children known to the ministry, of children living in poverty, of children in this province who are, we often say, our future, but sometimes we neglect and we hide.... Their future is of paramount importance to us. As we act today, let's think of what we can do tomorrow to support the child representative — and the day after tomorrow and the day after that.

With that, I ask all members of this House to support this appointment but also to support all of the measures we all have to take every day to ensure that every child in this province — not just some, but every child — has all the opportunities they need to have a happy life.

Mr. Speaker: Seeing no further speakers, the member for Prince George-Omineca closes debate.

J. Rustad: For me, this is a very proud moment, and I'm very honoured. I'm proud that our government has initiated this process, that we took the report which was presented to us by Justice Hughes, that we implemented his recommendations, we accepted his recommendations, and we thanked him for his recommendations. We brought forward legislation as quickly as possible last spring, which then, of course, struck this committee. I have to say that I am very honoured to have had the opportunity to chair and to work with the colleagues on this committee. They worked very hard in terms of bringing forward this recommendation.

Today is the day that the work that had been undertaken more than a year ago comes to fruition, and I'm very pleased that we will be able to celebrate here today the appointment of an individual who I believe will truly put children and youth first. That, to me, is what is so important about this debate and about this position. It will bring forward the opportunity for hope, the opportunity for collaboration, to be able to work together to bring forward solutions that face us in this province and that have faced every province in this country, to bring forward the ideas and the concepts to

work in a collaborative environment, to put politics aside so that the children and youth can truly come first.

There have been many speakers today, so far, that have talked at length of some of the challenges, some perhaps out of proportion. I would like to say that I will not taint this day of celebration by engaging in the political wrangling that has been presented in this House, because this truly is a day where both sides of the House should put aside any political perspectives to truly celebrate the opportunity to move forward an agenda, to move forward the ability to improve the system for children and youth.

I'd like to thank, once again, the members of the committee for their hard work. I look forward to the children and youth representative, to the work that that person will be doing in the coming months and years for the improvement of the system in general.

[1625]

Motion approved.

Hon. M. de Jong: I call Motion 73, standing in the name of the member for Prince George–Omineca.

APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

J. Rustad: I move:

[That the Legislative Assembly appoint Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond as the Representative for Children and Youth for the province of British Columbia for a term of five years pursuant to section 2 of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* (SBC 2006 Chapter 29 – Bill 34).]

Motion approved unanimously on a division. [See *Votes and Proceedings*.]

[1630]

Hon. M. de Jong: I move that the House at its rising do stand adjourned until it appears to the satisfaction of the Speaker, after consultation with the government, that the public interest requires that the House shall meet or until the Speaker may be advised by the government that it is desired to prorogue this session of the 38th parliament of the province of British Columbia. The Speaker may give notice that he is so satisfied or has been so advised, and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and, as the case may be, may transact its business as if it has been duly adjourned to that time and date, and in the event of the Speaker being unable to act owing to illness or other cause, the Deputy Speaker shall act in his stead for the purpose of this order.

On the motion to adjourn.

M. Farnworth: Normally, we would be dealing with this motion on the last day of a session. In this case, going by the calendar....

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: I see the member opposite wants to interject even before I've started my remarks. I can see that I may be having to take some time in educating him.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. The Opposition House Leader has the floor.

M. Farnworth: Anyway, the reason we do this motion is because it signals that the business of government and the business of this House has been completed. After this motion passes, there would be another motion, and that is that the House do now adjourn. But this motion is debatable, and it's debatable for a reason: because the government believes that the business of the House is finished, but the opposition may have a different view.

[1635]

Were this motion being debated on the 30th of November, it would be passing unanimously, but it's not the 30th of November. It is a few days before that, and there is still business in this House that needs to be done.

This House is not just the government's House; it's not just the opposition's House. It belongs to all members. In fact, it belongs to the people of British Columbia who elected each and every one of us and sent us here as hon. members to do the people's business. It's incumbent upon us that we remember that.

At the beginning of October, when the calendar would normally call us back, when the Speaker would call us back — in this case, it would have been the second or third of October — we would have looked forward to a full legislative session that would have ended on the 30th of November. That session would have given us the opportunity to raise questions in question period, to raise statements in our member statements, to take advantage of private member's bills, to take advantage of private member's statements, to take advantage of the orders of the day — all the opportunities that are afforded members of this House whether they are members of the executive council or not. It would have allowed each and every one of us to bring forward the issues that matter to the people in our constituencies and to the people in the province.

Unfortunately, that did not occur, because the government decided in its wisdom or lack thereof that the business of the House had been finished, that we did not need — in the words of my colleague across the way — busywork. Well, somebody else's busywork is another member's important piece of legislation that needs to be done.

You know, the Attorney General of this province tabled two pieces of legislation, the Public Inquiry Act and the Adult Guardianship Act. I'm quite sure that when his ministry prepared them, when he took them to cabinet committees and got the sign-off at those cabinet committees, when he took them to a cabinet meeting and had to convince his colleagues about the

importance of why these pieces of legislation needed to be on the agenda and be part of the government's program, little did he expect that they would, in fact, become just busywork.

Two important pieces of legislation that, regardless of where you stand on them as members, deserved to be debated, deserved to have the opportunity to be amended, deserved to be scrutinized by an opposition and the media for the public to understand why the Attorney General of this province and his entire ministry would go to such efforts.... Getting legislation on the agenda is not an easy thing to do, having sat in executive council and knowing how difficult it is. I know the work that went into those two pieces of legislation within the Attorney General's ministry. I know the work, the personal effort and the personal work, that the Attorney General would have had to do to get those two pieces of legislation on the cabinet table. And I know the disappointment that is felt within the ministry. I know the disappointment that would be felt by the Attorney General that his work is deemed busywork. That is not the way it's to be done.

There is time. There is time between now and the 30th of December — the 30th of November.

Interjections.

M. Farnworth: I know. I know I like sitting. I know I do like this House, but even the 30th of December is a bit long for me. By the 30th of November we could have had fulsome discussion, debate and question on those pieces of legislation, and they could have been dealt with in this House.

The government, for whatever reason, felt that that is busywork, which leads us to ask a question. When passing this motion, what assurance do we have in the future that legislation at the end of a session that is not passed and is scheduled for a fall session is even going to come to pass — that it will not once again be deemed busywork? It may well be legislation that the opposition is in favour of and thinks, with proper scrutiny and proper examination, would add to the security and to the well-being of the people of this province.

[1640]

The example that has been set in this session does not bode well. That's why it's important that we get on the record at this particular point in time our displeasure with the ending of the session, our displeasure with the failure to have the fall session, and the consequences in terms of what it means to the people of this province, whether it's the lack of opportunity for members in this House to ask questions or for members of the executive council to see their hard work deemed as busywork.

This House operates best when government and opposition understand each other's roles. We understand what the role of government is, we understand the power of government, and we understand government's desire for certainty and a legislative calendar. Well, I've been in this House now for going on 12 years, and from 1991 to 2001 there was not a calendar

such as we have right now. Government opened the session, and the opposition closed the session. The throne speech and the budget speech were done. Then we went into estimates, and we dealt with legislation.

I remember the Opposition House Leader and other members of the executive council in those days. They would question and take their time until they felt that every piece of legislation had had the questions asked that needed to be asked. Then the government would ask that motion that the House do now rise, and it would be met with unanimous support.

Sessions would last for months on end. They would start in March, and they would go sometimes....

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: My hon. colleague is absolutely right; they would run into August. I knew personally that we were sitting far too late when on my birthday, July 23, we were still sitting.

In 2001 the government changed, and they brought in a calendar. The calendar was intended to deal with the challenges that we face in the Legislature. It set fixed dates: a spring session and a fall session and the dates on which that session would start. It allowed for government to understand when legislation would be coming in. It allowed for the opposition to know how much time they had, to budget that time accordingly and to be able to say: "Okay, we can spend this much time in estimates. We'll spend this much time on legislation. We will do the people's business according to a calendar."

It's a very civilized way to do things, but part and parcel of that is that we stick to that calendar. We know what it is. The public knows what it is. The media knows what it is. By breaking with that calendar, we do this House a disservice. Had we stuck to that calendar, we would have been able to deal not only with the legislation that was on the order paper; we could have dealt with legislation regarding other issues that are of importance to this House.

We would have been able to deal with private member's bills, both government and opposition. I offer this up in the spirit of non-partisanship and of a House working on the people's business to benefit all British Columbians, and I'll give two examples.

My colleague the member for Port Moody-Westwood has a very admirable bill on child booster seats. We could have dealt with, and we still can, if we sit until November 30, that private member's legislation. We could deal with that and make a real improvement in the issue of safety to parents in this province, something worthwhile doing. I don't think that's busywork, and I'm sure the member for Port Moody-Westwood wouldn't say that was busywork.

[1645]

Here I will beg the indulgence of the House and members from both sides for a moment, because I know we normally do not make mention of the presence or absence of members. But my colleague the member for Victoria-Hillside is absent today...

K. Krueger: For the best of reasons.

M. Farnworth: ...for the very best of reasons. He and his wife are celebrating the birth on the weekend of their first child, a healthy baby girl at seven pounds, six ounces.

Were he here today and were we sitting till the 30th of November, there's a private member's bill that he has on the order paper dealing with the issue of payday loans and the challenges that people face when they have to deal with usurious interest rates that sometimes charge 100, 200, 600 percent. Again, that is an important piece of legislation — not busywork — that we could deal with in the next three days.

It's not too late, hon. Members. You can repent. See the error of your ways. There may yet be salvation for you.

I may make this in jest, but I make it in all seriousness. These are important issues that this House still has the time to deal with if it so chooses. It's not busywork.

There are other issues of broader importance that we could deal with. There is the issue around first nations. There are issues that our own Premier has stated around oil and gas, around first nations, that deserve to be discussed and debated in this House. We have three days to do that. We have three days to do the work of the people in this chamber. There are issues around health care, some of which have been canvassed in question period, but a lot more questions remain. They could be dealt with in other question periods over the next few days. We could debate emergency motions.

The bottom line is that the people's business should be our first concern, and the people's business is never busywork. It's important work.

In 2010 we're going to be hosting the 2010 Olympics, the Winter Olympics, which everyone in this House wants to succeed and to go off with as much success as possible. Part of that is rigorous examination. That's another issue we could be addressing and dealing with.

We could be dealing with the issue of climate change, which as we know, is of increasing importance to all of us and is impacting not only our environment but our economy with profound consequences for each and every one of us and our constituents. Again, that's hardly busywork.

When we're debating and discussing this motion that the House should now rise, we need to really think and ensure that we have dealt with every piece of business that we can possibly do, every piece of business that is of importance, before the 30th of November. The last thing we want to do, and I'm sure the last thing this government wants to do, is to somehow give the impression that this House is irrelevant and is just a plaything for those who think that we should waltz in and waltz out whenever we want, at our whim. That does not respect this institution. It does not respect the members of this House, and it does not respect the public of British Columbia on whose business we are here working.

We've had questions around private colleges. We have had questions around regulation of home inspectors. We have had questions on a host of topics and subjects, yet there's still more work to do. That's what this is about — doing the people's business.

[1650]

I ask the government members opposite to think about their Attorney General, to think about how much work he put into this legislation and the importance of it, to think about that, to look inside themselves and to step up to the plate and realize that if it was important enough for their Attorney General to recognize that the public of British Columbia could benefit from the changes he wanted to make, it's their duty to stand by their Attorney General and make sure that those legislative changes take place and that the public of British Columbia benefits from his wisdom and hard work.

Finally....

Interjection.

M. Farnworth: And we do, hon. Member. You will not be surrendering your rights.

I am just making the case that the good members opposite recognize the hard work and dedication of their colleagues, think about the mistake they are making by voting in favour of this motion and by adjourning the House at this point and, rather, recognize that three more days won't hurt. Three more days won't kill them.

There's good work to be done. They may take a beating or two in question period, but hey, that's the nature of the business. The good thing is that they will know that when we leave here on November 30, we have dealt with all the business and all their government business that they intended to do and to start. The session will not have been a failure for them.

With that, hon. Speaker, and those final imploring few comments on my part, I urge them, I ask them, I say to you: think about why you're here. Think about who it is you represent. Think about all those, even if it's something just as crass as.... Think about all those potential voters you'll make happy by doing the thing that you said you would do for them.

Think, hon. Members, of the importance of how much business we can get done in three more days and finish on November 30. Whether it's booster seats, whether it's payday loan regulation, whether it's legislation from the Attorney General, whether it's other private members' bills that have been tabled before this House, we owe it to the people of this province to do the people's business. As I said at the beginning of my speech, that is never, nor will it ever be, busywork.

N. Macdonald: I rise to speak against this motion. This House has a responsibility to all British Columbians to sit, and to sit for the time that's allotted to us. A need for accountability is why.... When I first came here and we met for the first time — the first time I sat here — we had the Clerk go through and explain to us the 500-year tradition of putting together a system of

government that allows those in power to be scrutinized for how they spend our money; challenged on the laws they make that constrain our lives — in our system the check and balance to a government that can easily slide into arrogance; and to make sure that arbitrary power is not common, that it is fought and scrutinized.

I lived for six years altogether in Africa. It is a place where opposition to government is severely restricted. I've seen what happens when you remove or restrict the ability of people to hold their government to account. What you get is that arrogance, and it does not work. It does not work for the governed, and it does not work for government. They become sloppy and arrogant.

[1655]

That sloppiness and arrogance, despite all of the work of the two members in opposition that were here, is evident for how often we go back and look at those four years and find fault. We are here today fixing what was completely foreseeable and what should have been pushed in the House if there was an opposition with the numbers that we have today. We need to meet in this Legislature to allow the public a voice. Without it, the government has massive powers, and it is easily able to escape accountability.

Now I have half an hour to speak, and I intend to use it to speak — to talk about the things that I came here to speak about, the things that Columbia River-Revelstoke sent me to speak about. What I cannot accept from any member is the idea that we are not here doing something important. Those that would vote in favour of a motion to recess and to say there's nothing here but busywork do a discredit to themselves and to this institution. If we are not here to do that, then what are we here for? What did we go and stand and run for election for if it is not to be here and do the business of holding the government to account, or if you are the government, to explain yourself and make sure the people of the province understand what you're trying to do and to explain it to them properly?

On November 2 George Weitzel, husband of Sullivan mine victim Kim Weitzel, began to try to speak for truth. He stepped into a difficult place for a grieving person. This is someone who describes himself as a bulldozer driver. He says, "I do not speak publicly," but he did. He started to speak publicly about his experience. He began to speak publicly about the concerns that he had with the provincial mine inspector's report. You'll remember perhaps that this report came out six months after the tragedy in Kimberley. It came out October 30.

On behalf of the families of the four people who died on May 17 at Sullivan mine, he said that they were not satisfied with the report. In his words he said — and he would ask me to pass that along in the venue that I'm chosen to come and represent his views in — that he didn't think that report was fair, he didn't think that report was complete and he did not think that report was accurate. What does a family do if government and a huge multinational...? Teck Cominco is a

massive company. What do you do as an individual if you need to face down and question those institutions? It is a huge thing to try to do.

The meeting on Sunday, October 29, between the families, the Minister of State for Mining and the mine inspector was described by the family as rancorous. The presentation of the report the next day was a full-on, message-delivering show by the government — government communications. It was incredible to witness. The accident was described as unprecedented, which is the position they're putting forward. It was done 15 times or more. Much of the media picked it up and reported it as such, and that is where the families needed to begin. They begin with a message delivered. They begin feeling that they cannot possibly be heard against the powers of government, against the powers of a huge multinational.

What tools does an ordinary person have? Well, what I would put to you today — and the relevance to this topic — is that one of the tools must include this assembly. If it is not part of the answer for citizens, if we do not make them feel empowered, then what are we doing here? Why are we here at all? So in my view, this is not busywork. This allows people to feel that they can stand up and if they think something is not right, there is an opportunity for them to fight and to seek justice. This Legislature is a significant tool, and to restrict the public's ability to question and scrutinize cannot be good for governance in any way.

On May 17 Kimberley found out four people had died on the grounds of Sullivan mine in a 10-by-10-by-8-foot plywood hut built over a four-foot-deep hole that was used for testing water samples. The water needed to be collected and tested because it passed through a sloped area made up of tailings from the mine.

[1700]

Sullivan mine, I'll remind you, was closed in 2001 after a century of mining lead, zinc and some silver. The tailings are acidic. Oxidation of rock that is acidic takes place when in contact with water, and that produces acidic water that needs to be tested, but it also produces oxygen-depleted air.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Mine inspector Hermann, in his report, says very clearly that the oxygen-depleted air that killed four people came from this mine waste dump leading into the water-sampling shed. That is what happened.

On October 30, then, the report was presented in Cranbrook by the mine inspector, but it did leave many, many questions. The family has said very clearly, as I indicated earlier, that they do not accept this report as definitive in any way. The line from the mine inspector repeated, as I said, 15, 20 times was that this was part of an unprecedented — and implicit in that was an unpredictable — event. End of story.

But in Kimberley, throughout the community, it's not only the families themselves, but it is people writing to me, sending e-mails, signing petitions, phoning.

To people there it is not the end of the story at all. It cannot be. Questions are about the hut built by Teck Cominco that killed four people. The questions go something like this. I don't intend this to be a conclusion. This is not a conclusion. These are questions that need to be answered — questions that would, amongst other places, be asked here. So this is not a conclusion. As I said, they are things that people have raised that I don't have the ability to answer, but somebody should.

Water that moves through the mine waste dump is collected by ditch and pipes and brought to a sump in a four-foot hole. It is to test water before treatment. Mine waste sat exposed to the elements. It sits out there. Water passes through it naturally through rain and other things, and it oxidates. We know that. It produces acidic water and oxygen-depleted air. The water is collected and directed to the test hole by ditching and pipes.

Now, it is known that the gas will also be directed. There is nothing new about this. We know that the gas will pass along through, so the question is this. Sump systems properly designed will prevent gas of any kind from getting into a hole, and you know that just by looking at your toilet or your sink. You know that it is designed to prevent gases from coming up through the pipe that you've built. So people are asking and deserve an answer: who put thought into that water collecting system? To many, it doesn't look like that sump was engineered at all. It was just built — with tragic consequences.

If it had been built differently, it would not have killed four people. That is the conclusion that many reach. If that is not true, then there is an onus upon us to make sure that the families understand exactly what took place and why that's not true. At this moment many in Kimberley would feel that that was poorly engineered and that there's a problem there that needs to be explored.

Eventually a hut was built over the test hole years later. That was to prevent that test hole from freezing. Now, this is significant. You are now building what amounts to a confined space, and it was built to prevent freezing. There are no lights. There's no ventilation. There was no consideration at all to the possibility of a gas buildup. If we know oxidation is the process going on and that oxygen-depleted air is a by-product, then surely there needs to be some due diligence done in the building of that hut, but none seems to have been done. If it was, that should be brought forward. The families should understand it and be able to question it.

We know the gas can move in the same way that water does when it goes into a hole with no proper mechanism to prevent the buildup of the gas. Then we put a small hut over the collection hole to further concentrate the oxygen-depleted gas. Then last October, as temperatures dropped and, likely, water flow was reduced, a metre-thick layer of gas-impermeable glacial till was used to cover the mine waste area. It was packed to seal the mine waste.

Was any consideration given to the possibility that this would concentrate gases towards the system used to concentrate and collect water? Was there any thought given to this at all? It seems reasonable that gas, including the oxygen-depleted gas that previously would have seeped through the porous mine waste surface, would now be trapped. That is not beyond the scope of possibility. Has that been explored at all?

On May 15, the day the first person died, it was hot. Kimberley is Canada's highest city. Spring comes late. The water was flowing for perhaps one of the first times, and there had been more work done around the shed just before May 15. Was any thought given by the company about the possible impact of this change? Is it so unpredictable that oxygen-depleted gas would be concentrated in the shed, a shed that was built and that killed four people?

There was no confined-space protocol. Everywhere else in the mine has a confined-space protocol. Was there no indication for people that this should be treated as a confined space? Because if there had been, it would have been entered differently, in a consistent way.

To say that this is unprecedented, to say that it could never have been predictable, is something that would be an affront to the family, and they've clearly indicated that it is. These are things that need to be investigated. It needs to be investigated outside of this House, but we need to have this venue to push government to make sure that it's investigated.

The families have a lot of questions, then, about the site that killed their loved ones. As I said before, I stand here not to give conclusions but simply to raise those questions — questions that we here need to consider because we promised these families that we would answer their questions and would try to learn, to make sure it did not happen again. That is something that I think all of us sincerely gave to these families.

What happened? Well, a person who worked as a contractor for Teck Cominco came onto this property alone. He enters a confined space built by Teck Cominco and is killed by oxygen-depleted air. This is on May 15.

The company does not keep track of him coming in, even though that is required by provincial law. One of the recommendations of the mine inspector in his report is that the company actually follow the law. They didn't follow the law. What is the penalty for that? It is nothing. What requires them to follow it now? Nothing. We need to be looking at that system. Is that a system that works? Is that a system that is going to ensure worker safety?

Someone paid by Teck Cominco comes onto Teck Cominco property, goes into a Teck Cominco-built hut and lies dead for two days. Teck Cominco is required to check on a lone worker every two hours — or is it two and a half hours? — but they break that law. They don't do that.

The mine inspector's third recommendation is to follow the law there and actually check on workers alone. If they don't, how does the government hold

them accountable? They do nothing. There is nothing in place to hold the company accountable. What sort of recommendation is that to give to the families?

Does the fact that this wasn't done impact the events that consequently unfolded? One of the things the mine inspector said was: "Well, we won't penalize them because it doesn't seem to have impacted subsequent events and caused the death of three people." The mine inspector says that, but what the family asks is: on what evidence does he reach that conclusion? If it's he who asserts it, then the onus is on him to prove it. He does not in the report, nor has he subsequently, and the family contests that.

Then there are conflicting testimonies about the actions of another Teck Cominco employee. That needs clarity. The family needs to know that everything that can be known about that is known, so it needs a further process, or it needs questions here in the Legislature.

There's the question of why paramedics without the training they needed were brought onto Cominco property and directed by a Teck Cominco employee into a building that Teck Cominco built, which killed them.

There are questions about subcontracting. There are questions about training. There are questions, questions, questions that should be raised here by the people that our electors chose. This is why we were chosen to do this.

[1710]

A gentleman phoned me at home. He wanted to talk about this incident. He had lost his son in an industrial accident. It was many years ago. It was a forklift accident, and part of his closure.... This was what he really wanted to say to me with talking about it. He made the point that part of the closure for him was getting all the information.

Before he could move on, he needed all of the information, and he needed to do his best to make sure that it would not happen again. He needed to make sure that it would not happen again. He needed to make sure that those of us with the ability to change things understood what we could do and what we should do, and only then can closure come.

At this time what I want members to understand is that the families reject the conclusion of the mine inspector's report. The community rejects the conclusion. I reject the conclusions. Mayor and council have called for a coroner's inquiry. That's one method. I have called for a coroner's inquiry. The critic for Labour has called for an inquiry. Many, many in the community have written to me or phoned asking for the same thing. The steelworkers....

They all want the same thing. They want to make sure that this is fully understood and that we do all we can to make sure that it does not happen again. Now there is still a coroner's report coming. I don't think it will be enough, but it's possible that it will. If it is, then fine. If not, then we should commit ourselves to making sure that we continue until the family and the community is able to find closure.

That's something that was important for me to say. It's something that I've waited a long time to say here.

We've said it with the tools that were available to us MLAs and the media. We've said it to individuals. We've talked as a community together, but it is one example of things that really.... They're not busywork. They are fundamentally what we do.

For all the jokes about politicians, people have tremendous respect for this institution. They have high expectations for us. They expect us to be here. They expect us to work. They expect us to fight — in a respectful way, but they want us to fight for them — to make sure that they have a voice through us here, so that if government is doing something that is not in the people's interests, we speak for them.

This is our opportunity. We have three days left. I would urge members to vote against this motion to give us that short, short period of time to do the people's business.

There are so many other things that I think we need to be talking about from my area. We have land use issues that are complicated and big and that people have strong opinions on. I'm happy to say that in past sessions some of the work that we've done here — and not only just speaking in this session, but in meetings with ministers — we've been able to work through. Other issues remain outstanding and need to be dealt with.

Land use issues. We have questions about forest health that are crucial to the community. We have questions about road maintenance. We have questions about convention centre overspending related to Olympic overspending. We have questions on homelessness and poverty.

The cancellation of the session, I think from my perspective, has been shameful. Even the few days we have had, the government has wasted time that we could have used. We had mornings available to us, afternoons available to us, evenings available to us that we did not have a chance to question government. Now we're going to be closed down again.

There's a saying about arrogance — and I think this is overriding everything that goes on here — that arrogance diminishes wisdom. But it's wisdom and thoughtfulness that British Columbians want from us. I would urge you to vote against this. Certainly, I know that on our side, we're happy to be here. We're proud to be here, and we know that we have business to do.

[1715]

D. Chudnovsky: I'm pleased and proud to stand with my colleagues this afternoon to speak against the motion before us.

Breathtaking arrogance. Those are the only words that I can think of to describe the way that the government and the governing party have treated this Legislature this fall. There are many issues, concerns and challenges that face the people of British Columbia. Because of the breathtaking arrogance of this government and their decision to cancel this sitting of the Legislature and their request that we leave here today and not use the remaining time available to us in this Legislature, those issues will not be canvassed.

In my view, that's an undermining and an undercutting of democracy. It shows contempt for the opposition. It shows contempt for the Legislature. But more important than either of those, it shows contempt for the people of the province. This Legislature belongs to the people of the province. It doesn't belong to the Premier. It doesn't belong to the executive council. It doesn't belong even to each of us together, the MLAs. The Legislature belongs to the people of the province.

Accountable government starts with a government prepared to come to the Legislature to put forward its ideas and legislation and to be prepared to be held to account by opposition. That's what accountable government is. This government chose this fall not to submit, not to agree with, not to be consistent with, that notion of accountable government.

We have to ask ourselves the question: why? What is it that moved government to choose not to meet here this fall? What is it that moves this government to suggest that the session should be over now? It's very important that we unpack that question because, as we all know, the government has a majority, so they can win every vote.

It's not a fear of losing a vote in the Legislature that moves this government to its breathtaking arrogance. They can win. It must therefore be a fear to discuss, a fear to debate, a fear to answer questions. When we have a government that's afraid to debate, that's afraid to discuss, that's afraid to answer questions, then it seems to me that the only phrase we can use to describe them is breathtakingly arrogant.

We're all here. We had a vote a few minutes ago. Everybody was here except for maybe a couple of folks who, for one reason or another, weren't able to be here, but there were certainly more than 70 members present. We're all here. We're elected to do the people's business. We're ready to go.

The government controls the agenda. They decide what the content of the discussion is to be. It's up to them. But no, over the last few days what we've heard is: "House Leader, move to adjourn. House Leader, move to adjourn. House Leader, move to adjourn." It's colossal and breathtaking arrogance. It's a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of parliamentary democracy. It's another example of treating the people of the province with contempt.

[1720]

Had we had a session and were we to have a few more days to discuss the business of the people of the province, I, as one of 79 members of this House, would have had a lot of things that I'd want to discuss. Take, for instance, a couple of weeks ago. The federal transportation committee, a committee of members of the House of Commons, voted unanimously to hold an investigation of railway safety. In the motion that they passed, they referred directly to events that have taken place over the last year and a little bit here in British Columbia.

They referred to the spill of caustic soda into the Cheakamus River in their motion — which was passed unanimously in the House of Commons in Ottawa —

as a catastrophe. They referred directly to the deaths of workers near Lillooet. They referred directly to the record for maintenance and safety of CN since the time that B.C. Rail was privatized by this government.

I would have wanted — and I'd be happy to, tomorrow or the next day; I'm here, ready to go — to talk with the Minister of Transportation, who acted as if he were a public relations officer for CN over the last year. Every time there was a problem, he said: "Oh, they're doing great. They're getting better. They're working at it."

Rather than holding them to account and advocating for the people of British Columbia over the last year, he acted on behalf of CN. I'd like to have, over the last six weeks or maybe in the next few days, talked to the Minister of Transportation about that. I'd like to invite the Minister of Transportation to attend the hearings of that federal committee looking into rail safety and to report to them what discussions, if any, took place at the time of the privatization of B.C. Rail about safety or maintenance.

Let him stand up for the people of British Columbia for a change, instead of working for CN. This is an investigation that we on this side of the House have been asking for, for more than a year. I never heard the Minister of Transportation ask for that investigation. He was busy making excuses for CN. But we've asked for it, and we're happy it's going to happen, and we'd like the Minister of Transportation to be there to tell that committee what he knows about safety and maintenance with respect to CN. I would have liked to have a chance to talk to him about that over the last few weeks, and I certainly would still like to have the opportunity to do that over the next few days.

I'm against this motion. But those on the other side, it seems to me, think that that's busywork. They think it's busywork to stand up for the environment of British Columbia, to advocate on behalf of the families of those workers who were killed in those accidents. That's busywork, as far as this government is concerned. We don't think so. We think that we have to be here to discuss those issues.

Over the break, since the adjourning of the House in the spring, I had a wonderful opportunity to meet with a group of ranchers from the Cariboo. I travelled up with my dear friend, the member for Cariboo North. We met in Williams Lake with a number of ranchers. That was between the time that the House adjourned in the spring and when it was supposed to reconvene here this fall. I heard a lot of things that were of great concern to the ranchers in the Cariboo, about maintenance of fencing along the CN line, about the deaths of cattle caused by accidents with CN trains.

These are fine folks, who it was a pleasure and a privilege to meet, and they had some questions they wanted asked. They wanted some advocacy from government, from ministers of the Crown, on their behalf, to make sure that their livelihood was protected, to make sure that the rights which they had become accustomed to during the time when B.C. Rail was the railway that belonged to the people of British Colum-

bia.... That was the one that was never going to be privatized. Remember that one? During that time their rights and their interests were protected. Things have changed, and they want some questions asked.

I would have liked to have had an opportunity in this House over the last six weeks to talk about that with the Minister of Transportation and others on the other side of the fence, but there was breathtaking arrogance on the part of this government. They decided that it's busywork to ask questions on behalf of the people of this province, to come to this House and hold the government to account. That's busywork. They don't want to do that.

[1725]

Well, they've got an opportunity to do it over the next three days, and we're happy to be here. I'm happy to be here to ask those questions. And to do that, members on the other side have to agree with us that it's important to support this democratic institution, that it's important that a government has to stand and be accountable for its actions, that it's important that an opposition has the opportunity to ask questions and engage in debate and discussion. But they're afraid of that — another example of breathtaking arrogance.

This fall there's been a discussion in the lower mainland about rapid transit to the Tri-Cities, to the northeast sector. People in the Tri-Cities have been waiting for years. They were promised rapid transit for years. In fact, you'll recall that at the time of the approval of the then RAV line — they got a new name for it — the people of the Tri-Cities were promised, again, that their project for rapid transit was number one on the list of priorities in the lower mainland, consensus number one. Everybody agreed that was the thing that had to be done first — rapid transit to the Tri-Cities.

But government had a different idea, a different agenda, a different set of priorities, and they imposed on the people of the lower mainland a different plan — first, the RAV line. The people of the Tri-Cities were promised, in exchange for support for the RAV line, that the rapid transit to the northeast sector would be done contemporaneous with the rapid transit to the airport. On the basis of that promise, people went against their better judgment and supported this other project that was the priority of the government.

Now, not surprisingly, the people of the Tri-Cities, of the northeast sector in the lower mainland, are saying: "Well, where's the rapid transit? Where's the project that we were promised?" I make this point because this is information that became available to us during the period between the close of the session last spring and when the session was supposed to be opened this fall. Subsequent to that, we find out that this government and the representatives of the people of the municipalities in the lower mainland agree that there are nowhere near enough resources to carry out that project as there need to be.

Of course this government, when it comes to rapid transit projects in the lower mainland, is prepared to provide about 20 percent of the capital costs, whereas previous governments — NDP and Social Credit gov-

ernments — provided 100 percent of the resources for that kind of project. So not surprisingly there's a problem with resources, and the people of the northeast sector are once again seeing the promise begin to melt away.

I would have liked to have been here over the last six weeks during the time when the Legislature was scheduled to ask some questions about that, have some discussions about that, advocate on behalf of the people of that area of the lower mainland. That's my job. It's what I was elected to do.

Those on the other side of the aisle were elected to listen to those questions. That's their job. They're not supposed to be able to run away from that job. It's breathtaking arrogance on behalf of this government to think that, as the Leader of the Opposition said earlier this week, they can waltz in and waltz out of this place whenever they feel like it. That's not parliamentary democracy.

What's required of government is that they take the hard shots. What's required of the opposition is that they be prepared to ask the tough questions. In this House we've got an opposition prepared to do its job, but a government that's running away from theirs. Breathtaking arrogance.

Had we had a session and were we to have some time over the next few days, there are issues about rural roads that I would have brought to the attention of the minister and brought to the attention of the House on behalf of people who have communicated with me as the opposition critic for transportation and who have real problems and real issues and real challenges in their communities that they want taken care of. They want somebody to ask the questions and somebody's willing to do that. But they want somebody to answer the questions, and that somebody isn't prepared to do that. That somebody wants to run away from the House. We say no. We're voting against this motion.

[1730]

Since privatization and with the increase in the pine beetle problem and a reduction in maintenance standards on roads across the province, we've got all kinds of roads — in the rural areas especially — that are in need of capital improvements and maintenance improvements. We've got a minister who's hypnotized by billion-dollar transportation projects in the lower mainland but isn't taking into account the real problems that real people face with respect to transportation in the rest of the province. Highway 20, Highway 97, Highway 3 and the Trans-Canada — all of them are in need of work. All of them are in need of improvements. They're not the only ones; they're just examples.

Then we hear the minister last week on the radio — not in the House, on the radio — announcing that the expected funding, the expected resources from the federal government for the much-needed improvements to the Trans-Canada Highway, are going to be lower than we had expected. I would have liked to have had some time in the House to talk to the minister about that. It's my job. It's what I was elected to do, and I'm willing to do it. I'm willing to be here, and so are the

people on this side, but on the other side they want to run away. They want to run away from their responsibility to answer the questions. Breathtaking arrogance, Madam Speaker.

Since the adjournment of the House last spring, and when the House was supposed to open this fall, what happens at the beginning of September every year? We have the beginning of school every year. This is a historic year in this province, because Bill 33 began to be implemented this September. Bill 33 — which, you will remember, saved the government's bacon after they had precipitated a crisis in the schools of this province last year — wasn't what teachers wanted. We all know that historically, teachers have wanted class sizes and support for special needs students in collective agreements. That was the teachers' position, but teachers chose to compromise with this government on Bill 33 last year.

We began to see the implementation of Bill 33 this fall. In between when the House adjourned in the spring and when it was supposed to open this fall, in October, came the implementation of Bill 33. You know what, Madam Speaker? There are some questions to ask about the implementation of Bill 33, about the availability of resources to make sure that it actually works and serves the needs of the children of the province.

I know that I and many others on this side of the House would have liked to ask some questions and have some discussion about Bill 33's implementation, because the purpose of Bill 33 was to make things better for the kids of the province. We would still like to do that over the next three days, but not this government. The opposition is ready. The opposition has been ready to ask the questions, to put forward the challenges and to make sure that the government is held to account, but not this government. This government runs away from that; it runs away from it. Breathtaking arrogance.

In my constituency in Vancouver, homelessness and poverty are important issues. In my constituency we have neighbours — and I call them neighbours because they are our neighbours — who are living on the street. They're living on the street in increasing numbers. In my constituency, like in all of ours, almost 25 percent of the kids are living in poverty. That was reasserted to us last Friday — wasn't it? — when the latest figures came out. We recall last year this government saying, "No, no, no, no; those are old figures; those are old numbers," when we brought up the issue of child poverty — which means families in poverty. When we brought up the issue of child poverty, this government and the ministers on the other side said: "No, no, no, no. Things are great. Those are old numbers with respect to child poverty."

Well, they're new numbers. They came last Friday, and it seems to me incumbent upon this House to discuss those figures. It's our responsibility as the opposition to question this government about those numbers — the impact on children, the impact on families, what it means and what we can do together to ameliorate

that situation, to make things better for those kids and their families. That's our responsibility.

[1735]

We're ready to do that, Madam Speaker. On this side of the House the opposition is prepared, was prepared from the time that this session was supposed to start, continues to be prepared and is ready for the next three days during the period in which this House is supposed to sit — continues to be prepared to do our job. That's our job. That's what we were elected to do.

The people said, "Go to the Legislature and ask the tough questions," and we're ready to do that — but not this government. They want to run away. They wanted to run away between the middle of October and now, and they only were dragged kicking and screaming into the House for what they hoped would be an hour or two.

Now they want to run away again and waste those last three days on which we are supposed to be, on which the people expect us to be, doing our jobs. Our job is to ask the tough questions; this government is to be accountable. But no, they're unprepared to do that. Breathtaking arrogance.

I want to conclude by saying this. We should take, in my submission, our responsibilities very seriously. The stuff of democracy should not be messed with. The people expect us to do the simple jobs that they elected us to do. They're really rather simple. We can make a big deal out of it, but they're rather simple.

They expect the government to come to the House with their ideas for building a better British Columbia and their legislation for building a better British Columbia. They expect that the government will come to the House and do that business. That's what they expect. They expect us on this side to ask the tough questions, to debate the difficult issues, to hold government to account.

I want to say, with the greatest of seriousness, that this government has made a terrible mistake in thinking that they can run away from their part of that responsibility. They've made an awful mistake. It's a mistake that shows contempt for the people of the province and arrogance towards the people of the province.

We on this side are ready to do our job. I urge every member of this House to vote against this motion. Stand up for democracy, stand up for accountability, and stand up for a parliamentary system that expects the government to have the jam to stand in front of the opposition and answer the tough questions.

C. Trevena: Madam Speaker, like my colleagues, I would like to stand to speak against this motion. Like my colleague from Vancouver-Kingsway said, it smacks of outrageous arrogance to come to the House with a very important matter of business.... Nobody questioned how important it was to have a children's commissioner. This was vital. This is something that we have been calling for, for many, many months since the office was abolished by this government.

So I don't diminish the reason that we were called back, but we shouldn't have had to be called back in

the first place. We should have been here doing, as my colleagues have said, the people's business for the last few weeks. Instead, we get called back by the Speaker, with no agenda. It's just that there are issues to discuss, so the Speaker calls us back.

[1740]

We have a very important issue to discuss, but we have more than that issue. We have issues that are important to the people of British Columbia. I have to admit that it surprises me that the government has only brought one thing to us. I think it shows that maybe it isn't arrogance; maybe we're overestimating the intelligence of this government. Maybe it is a government that now, after five and a half years, is completely devoid of ideas and has absolutely nothing to offer the people of British Columbia, which is another reason to stand against this motion.

It would be very nice to continue to ask questions and continue to bring up the issues that matter to the people of British Columbia and matter to the people in each of our individual constituencies, in 79 constituencies — not just in those on this side of the House but in 79 constituencies — to discuss them, debate them and work on them. But maybe this is a government that is arrogant and completely devoid of ideas.

Alternatively, the arrogance.... This is very possible — that the government can set the parliamentary calendar, let everyone know there is going to be a fall session and then just say: "We don't want a fall session. It doesn't suit us. We don't want that sort of accountability. We don't like being questioned, and we certainly don't want another three days of being questioned when, unfortunately, we have had these last three days of being questioned."

I think maybe there is just a simple contempt — a contempt for procedures and a contempt for the people of British Columbia. This government may not have any issues, and it may see the work that we do in this House as busywork. I think that is very sad, because as my colleague from Columbia River-Revelstoke and my colleague from Vancouver-Kingsway suggested, this is a contempt for parliamentary procedure and parliamentary democracy. Having an opposition and having accountable government is one thing which sustains our democracy. It is part of having a healthy democracy.

Like some others in this chamber, I've worked in places where democracy has been under threat; where people will die to sustain a democracy; where people, if they had the opportunity to have a House with a fixed session, would be revelling in the opportunity — not trying to rush out saying: "We have no business. Let's close this place down as quickly as we can, because we don't want to be questioned." Instead, the members of this government are willing to toss away this essential pillar of our parliamentary democracy and just say: "That's it. We haven't got anything we want to do."

It isn't like we don't have issues that we need to address locally and provincially. The government says that it is being held to account by having conversations

on certain things. Yes, it's very important to take issues to the people, but it's very important to bring the people and people's questions to this House.

We have the government having its conversation on health care, and while that is very important, I wonder whether this government would be willing to be challenged here in this House about seniors who are having to question whether they can afford medicine, whether they can afford food or whether they can afford to heat their homes. These are the issues that this House should be addressing. They should be addressing those families who are wondering where they're going to get care for their elderly relatives. These are the sorts of issues this House should be addressing and why we should be here continuing this session until it finishes, and this is why I stand against the motion.

We do have an arrogant government, a government that has no ideas. How many conversations does it take to replace being questioned by a loyal opposition? This has not gone unnoticed. The people of B.C. are very aware that we didn't have a session, and then we were called back. I think we all went back to our constituencies this weekend, and we had comments from a lot of people — "Good to see you back" — from both sides of the House, I'm sure. At least, my constituents were saying they were glad to see that we were up there having a chance to question this government again.

I said to them: "Well, you know, the session doesn't finish till next Thursday, so hopefully we'll be able to carry on." But I think what people are asking is: what is this government afraid of? Is it afraid of having questions on climate change or on private colleges or on Olympic overspends? Is it afraid of being questioned when it actually has no answers, when it's so devoid of ideas and answers that it has no moral foundation anymore? Is it afraid of issues such as women's issues coming up?

Since the House should have been in session, we have tragically seen two women in Surrey killed and a third one seriously injured. While people stood up and said how terrible this is — and it is terrible; it is tragic, and it's not a political football — there are issues that this raises. It raises the issue of women's centres, but this government isn't here to answer those questions.

[1745]

It raises the issues of counselling for women and for women who face violence. It raises the issues that there is a six-month wait for women who have been victims of violence to get counselling. But the government hasn't been willing to have those questions answered, because it hasn't been here. It raises questions of access to legal aid. It raises questions of support for women in our communities. Yet this government has basically turned a deaf ear to it. Women are getting no answers, whether it's the women in Surrey, whether it's the women in Kamloops who have seen their women's centre closed since this House should have been in session or whether it is women who are simply trying to get on and make the most of things, get their kids to school and see that Bill 33 doesn't really work. These questions need to be answered.

I also stand against the motion because there are other questions provincially which are important. During this summer the Minister of State for Childcare sent out a letter to child care providers saying that the government would try to maintain funding till the end of June. That's it — nothing more. No answers for the child care providers, no answers for the families whose kids are going to child care, and no chance for the opposition to raise these questions with the Minister of State for Childcare. No chance for anybody to ask: what's going to happen to the child care centres in my communities? What's going to happen to those child care centres that are facing massive deficits and may have to close because of the potential loss of operating funds?

What about those families who are wondering how they're going to find an extra \$100 to \$200 a month to pay for child care costs? There is uncertainty about child care funding, but there is no way we can get answers, because this government is too afraid of having questions asked and decides to shut down the House instead of answering questions.

There is no one to answer a very simple question of: where is a child care plan? This is a very big issue, but it's not such a hard question. The government promised to bring this to the House back in January, and we're still waiting for that to be answered.

Federally, three parties have voted in favour of a national plan, and that includes the Liberals. Perhaps this government would like to take on what its namesake in Ottawa has done and have a real child care plan, but clearly not. It's not willing to address this. It's not willing to be challenged.

As my colleague from Vancouver-Kingsway said, last week we saw once again — not old figures but new figures — that B.C. has one in four children living in poverty. In my own constituency, in Campbell River one in four families with school-age kids has an income of less than \$30,000 a year. That's below the poverty level. Twenty-five percent of families of school-age children are vulnerable.

Campbell River is a comparatively rich community. This is an indictment. Yet I have no recourse to ask the members opposite what they're going to do about this, what they are going to do to help me tackle this serious issue in my community, because they decide there really isn't that much that's important. Certainly child poverty is not one of the important things, despite the fact that we are an extremely rich province, despite the fact that we have a commitment — we hear from the opposite side — to having a golden decade and five great goals. Despite this, the government is not willing to listen to questions. That is why I stand against this motion. Again, it is washing its hands of the serious issues that we have in our communities.

Again in Campbell River recently, about three weeks ago, the report came out showing the level of youth exploitation. The fact that youth exploitation is rising in some of our communities, including my own, isn't because young people want to go into the sex trade. It's because of poverty. Yet I cannot raise these

questions of poverty and problems in my community because, again, the House isn't sitting, and this government doesn't want to answer questions. It is, as my colleagues earlier have said, arrogant.

[1750]

I would like to be asking the government why it is doing nothing about rebuilding the social safety net, why it isn't looking seriously at addressing issues that we do bring up quite regularly about income assistance — the two-year independence test, the two out of five years. How can we address these so that the most vulnerable people are not exploited, so that people in my community and in other communities across this province are able to get the social assistance they need?

Instead we get, effectively, cynicism from the Premier, who does admit that shelter rates — that portion of income assistance, \$325 a month for a single person — are too low. The government announces, during a period when the House should be in session, that it is going to increase the shelter rates. But it doesn't allow us to ask by how much, and it doesn't allow us to press this government on doing it now rather than waiting for the new financial year.

Now — when people need shelter, when we've had torrential flooding, when we've got freezing temperatures — we're not allowed to challenge this government, because this government decides we have no business. "We're just back for a couple of days to get our business through, our one item through, and that's it. We don't want to have to listen to you. We don't want to have to answer any questions." But there is a desperate need.

I have had people coming into my office who simply say: "I don't know how I'm going to afford to keep my place this winter, because I can't afford my hydro bill, I can't afford my food, and I can't afford my rent." These are issues that we should be addressing and that it is incumbent on all of us as legislators to address.

We hear that the government is committed to a housing strategy. But what about the issues of homelessness? What about the fact that shelters have been full throughout this last weekend because of the weather? In Campbell River the Salvation Army is keeping its soup kitchen open tonight just because there is no other place for people to go. Their shelter is full.

I've been working with a group of people in the community — the chamber of commerce, churches and advocates — to try to find emergency shelter. But we need long-term answers, and this government, in its arrogance and its lack of commitment, is refusing to work on long-term answers and is refusing to give answers to any of our questions.

People know that shelter and the right to shelter are basic human rights. People in my community know that, and they would like a few answers. They would like to know when the shelter rate is going to go up and how much they're going to get. They would like to know that the housing strategy is more than rent subsidies. They would like to know that their mobile homes are not going to be taken away from them.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I would like to ask the members opposite — and I don't get much opportunity to do so — how many people from mobile home parks they have in their constituency offices who are worried about losing the home they have had for years because of changes in legislation that this government has brought in.

There are other issues that I would have liked to bring in. Health care. We've had some discussion on health care in question period. There are always questions about health care.

I would like to have asked the minister responsible for health about the location of the hospital in Campbell River. It's going to be moved down-Island. It's going to be moved away from about 50,000 people. I drove the road where it's going to be moved to yesterday in the snow and ice. It is 40 kilometres. They say that it's not so far. Forty kilometres in that sort of weather is treacherous.

These are the sorts of questions I would like to have brought in. Instead of being able to ask questions, I write a letter to the minister, and the minister responds with a letter to a local newspaper. I don't think this is acceptable. I would like to know why this government continues with its arrogance when we are here to ask questions on behalf of our constituents.

I would also have liked to ask the minister about ambulance coverage in my constituency and in other rural constituencies. I know that we have been trying to address this through question period. In my constituency I know that in one community at the moment, it's likely that there's not going to be ambulance coverage over Christmas because people are overstretched. They do not get the recompense they need to do this very vital task in our communities. It's a volunteer ambulance service, and so they say: "We don't want to do this."

We need to be addressing these issues. We need to make sure that we get those loyal, hard-working volunteers committed to carrying on. But we can't do that unless we have a House sitting where we can raise these questions.

[1755]

These are some of the questions I would like to have brought. I would also like to have brought questions of economics, questions about what's happening in the forest industry. There is a crisis in the coastal industry. The members opposite recognize that and have admitted to that. I would have liked to have been able to ask questions about what this means and how we can address it and to have got to ask questions about fibre supply, so that the mills in my community can maintain their operation.

I'd like to ask questions about the consolidation of industry. We have Western Forest Products, a very big company responsible for nearly all the Crown lands, the Crown TFLs in my community. I would have liked to ask the Minister of Forests and Range about that and what sort of precautions are there to make sure that that isn't exploited and what sort of assistance is going to be offered to other communities where they do not have access to the logs from Western.

But with this arrogance that this government has and with its lack of willingness to have questions asked of it, it has decided that it doesn't want to hear anything. I have not had the opportunity to ask that, but noting the hour, I do move that the House do now recess for a half-hour for dinner break.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands recessed until 6:35.

The House recessed from 5:57 p.m. to 6:34 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

C. Trevena: Before we recessed, I was talking about why I'm against this motion. I've talked about provincial issues that I think need to be addressed. I've also been talking about issues in my own constituency — social issues, issues of health care and the siting of the new regional hospital. I think this is really an issue that does need to be addressed by this House because of the financial investment, the likelihood of it being a public-private partnership, its location and the concerns in the community. I talked about issues of ambulance service, and I've talked about issues of poverty in my community, as well as homelessness and housing issues.

[1835]

I've also just been discussing the issue that I would like to have raised about economic issues in my community and about the coastal forestry and problems that are there that I would like to have raised with the Minister of Forests and Range. Unfortunately, because we haven't had a session for the last two months and because we are being asked to adjourn this session, these last few days, three days early, and I think because of the arrogance of the government, I'm not going to have the opportunity, and my colleagues aren't going to have the opportunity to discuss this with the government.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

I also have within my own constituency.... I do get the sense that this government is afraid of rural concerns, and it's something that I'd like to have addressed with them. One of the issues that is very important for my communities, as for others on this side of the House and, I believe, on that side of the House, and that would be very good to address — and I'm glad to see the Minister of Transportation is back in the House — is the issue of our....

Deputy Speaker: Member. Member, you cannot refer to members in the House — whether they're present or not.

C. Trevena: My apologies, Minister.

The issue of ferries. We are a ferry-dependent island, obviously. We are an island. We depend on our ferries, and I represent islands that also depend on fer-

ries. Since the House wasn't sitting at a time when the House was supposed to be sitting, I would have had the opportunity to raise the issue of yet another increase in fares with the minister. I'm sure the minister would have said that it's not his responsibility, but it would have been an opportunity to raise the fact that we have seen an over 50-percent increase in some of our fares, so that some constituents in my communities are having to pay over \$400 just to be able to get from Campbell River back to their communities.

I know that this is supposed to be a business-friendly government, but I'd have liked to have been able to raise the issue with the government about how business-friendly they are when we are having businesses being damaged because they cannot have their customers reach them, they cannot get the produce they need, and so on. Because of the way that the House has moved and the way that we have not had this session, I have not been able to have this opportunity and will not be able to have this opportunity, because of the fact that we have a motion that looks likely to be carried.

I'd also like to raise one last thing that did leave my phone ringing off the hook. Again, it's an issue that came when the House was not in session. It came during the summer, the issue of lodges in our parks. This is one that left my phone ringing off the hook, left my e-mail box full. I was hoping to be able to raise this with the Minister of Environment about what seems to be — we've been talking about arrogance — an arrogant move by the Minister of Environment. Because the House isn't sitting and because we are not having the opportunity in these last few days to continue, I can't raise the issues of my constituents, which is the issue of lodges in our parks.

Cape Scott is one of the provincial parks where lodges are likely to be built. I had hoped that there'd be more than a letter-writing campaign from my constituents on this issue and more than a letter-writing campaign on line, and that I'd be able to ask the Minister of Environment why this was going to go ahead and what the plans were. Again, the arrogance of this government means that we can't ask any questions.

I find it very frightening — the very cavalier attitude that the members opposite have shown. They've said that we were going to have a fixed session and then decided not to have it. They call us back for one item of business, which is extremely important but does not allow for other very important issues to be discussed. I fear that this arrogance is going to continue.

But let me say that I, as a member of this Legislative Assembly, along with my colleagues, will continue questioning this government, whether or not we are in the House. We would hope to be in the House to carry on the people's business, but we will carry on asking questions, and we'll carry on demanding that the people's business be done.

[1840]

G. Robertson: It's my great privilege to rise and speak against the motion to adjourn this House. It's

with great regret that I see only three days left on the set legislative calendar after having only been here for three days. To hear the government attempt to adjourn the House with this motion, in my opinion, is highly, highly arrogant. For them to have the audacity to shut down the people's House before this sitting is through, when we haven't even had a chance to get into the issues at hand, is very troubling. This is something that I've heard repeatedly for the last two months from my constituents in Vancouver-Fairview. This is something I've heard as I've travelled around the province as the critic for Small Business, Revenue and Deregulation.

It's a great concern to all of the people of British Columbia when their House is shut down, when their expectation is that we come here to do the people's business, to do business on behalf of the businesses of B.C., to build the future of B.C., to make law that makes sense, that creates a viable and positive future for our kids and our grandkids. There are a great number of issues that could have been brought forth over these last many weeks, and certainly, if this motion does not pass, we will have the opportunity to canvass those issues over the next several days.

I'll start with a really critical issue. I rose in the House last Thursday to bring up the issue of the dirty drinking water. Almost a million people in the lower mainland were having to boil or were having to buy water. People on Vancouver Island went through similar challenges. At one point we had half of the province with unsuitable drinking water due to the extreme weather, brought on by the big storm that hit the province November 14, 15 and 16. Clearly, we were not prepared in the least for that kind of weather and that kind of disruption to our fragile drinking water systems.

Ironically, we're here tonight in the Legislature with the temperature dropping rapidly. We're supposed to hit minus 7, minus 8 tonight, which is very unusual in the south coast of B.C. in November. Again, I don't know how many more extreme weather events we need in rapid succession for us to take the issue of global warming seriously in the B.C. Legislature. B.C.'s government right now is a laggard on global warming, on addressing global warming, both adaptation and mitigating the onset of global warming.

Had we been sitting these last many weeks.... Along with many governments around the world, along with countless academics and economists working on the issue of global warming — climate change, the impacts, the accelerated impacts that are being felt around the world right now.... It has arisen now as the primary challenge of our time and the foremost formidable challenge for our children and grandchildren to have anything like the kind of world that those of us here have had the privilege of living in.

It's very, very disturbing when this government pursues an agenda to accelerate global warming, to accelerate the impact on our communities and to degrade the environment that our kids and grandkids are going to depend on. When this government moves forward, recommending coal-fired power plants, when

the Premier from the People's Republic of China announces that offshore oil and gas will proceed in the next two or three years.... That debate hasn't happened in this House. We could start in on that debate over the next couple of days here; get a start on it. Let's talk about it here. That's what we're here to do.

I don't believe there's been anywhere near the kind of consultation that the New Relationship calls for with first nations on the coast of B.C. to make oil and gas development offshore a reality. I don't think the communities on the coast of B.C. have seen that kind of consultation. Certainly, we have not had the opportunity to debate the merits, the challenges and the impacts that oil and gas development offshore will have on our climate, on our fresh water, on our marine ecosystems, on our salmon runs.

[1845]

Those are debates that could all happen over these next couple of days. They could start up. Certainly, we could have been into them over these last number of weeks and, really, be asking that question.

Is now the time to be accelerating the development of fossil fuels in B.C., when thousands upon thousands of credible scientists with peer-reviewed science, Nobel laureates, have come forward and said: "Whoa, we need to slow this ship down"? They have raised the alarm repeatedly for a decade now, and many governments around the world....

Even the government next door to us to the south — in the United States, in Senate Committee meetings — is taking the issue seriously. With the change in the Senate and the House in the United States, we see a government coming to grips with the policies they've had, particularly on fossil fuel development and energy policy over the last five years, which they now acknowledge have been wrong-headed and have done more to radically accelerate climate change on this planet than anyone would have guessed.

This government has no targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. That would have been a fantastic subject to tackle. I wonder how the grandchildren of the members opposite will look back at us here in November 2006, after massive flooding and drinking water disruption and after the biggest cold snap for a November. And we have no targets for reducing our greenhouse gas emissions to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Is this government intending to just let it ride? "Let's go through all this oil and gas and coal, coalbed methane. Let's pump it. Let's crank it. Let's sell it at a discount. How about that? Let's sell it as far as we possibly can. That's economic development. Forget the future generations. They can figure it out when they get here. They can sort out the mess that we leave behind."

Maybe we should be having that debate in this House this week, before we go off on holidays. Maybe we should have had that debate over the last couple of months instead of being kept away from the House, because talking about global warming and climate change and the relationship of energy policy to it.... That's busywork.

That's an abrogation of democracy — to keep this House empty when there are issues of that import that need to be addressed and when it's our responsibility, both to the people who elected us and to the people who follow us living in this province.... We owe it to them. We are responsible to them to address these issues in a meaningful way.

I harken back to my last estimates debates in the spring with the Energy Minister. It would have been great to have followed up on the questions that I had for him this fall. We could still do so in the next few days, on the energy plan and the update to the energy plan. The fact that the public, the citizens of British Columbia, have no opportunity to have input into the updated energy plan....

It's as if the opinions of the people from the Peace country to here on southern Vancouver Island, from the Kootenays to Haida Gwaii, don't have an opinion, don't have any expertise and don't have the right to have input on their energy future. Again, that relates directly to what will happen here to our climate and to what will happen here to our water, to our farmland and to our forests.

Despite farmers and fishers, despite those who work in the woods and the forest industry and those who work right now making sure that drinking water gets to everyone in B.C., raising the alarm that things are changing way faster than anyone would have anticipated, that what's happening in our oceans, along our coasts and in our forests — from mountain pine beetle to many other infestations that are taking hold, to the loss of the western red cedar on the south coast of B.C., to the appearance of southern species in the north of B.C.... When those alarm bells are ringing, we have an obligation to be in this House debating the reality that this province is facing.

[1850]

But no, this is government by whim and fancy. This is a government that decides, "Well, there are other things we could do. We could go out and set up a conversation on health," rather than having a debate on health.

We had a robust question period today, questioning the direction in our health care system, questioning the privatization that this government blithely accepts. We could be having that debate over these next couple of days. We could be addressing the False Creek clinic, the surgical centre that is in my riding of Vancouver-Fairview, which is a hotbed of health care in B.C.

All kinds of issues come up every day. I hear about them in my constituency office, whether it's emergency room conditions at VGH.... There the emergency room physicians, earlier this year, actually had the courage to step up and make a strong statement about the conditions that had deteriorated. What I heard last week from physicians in the emergency room of Vancouver General Hospital is that it's even worse. It has gotten worse.

We could be debating that. We could be talking about what should be done. Apparently that is not a priority or an option for this government.

Well, I'll just bring up another issue that surprises me from a government that has claimed, over time, to be a friend of business, a pro-business government. What a message this government sends to business in B.C. when they fail to show up, when we have the fewest number of sitting days in a year, average, in the modern history of B.C.

Imagine if staff at a successful business decided: "You know what? We're going to go for the fewest days of work this year, and let's see how we do on the bottom line." Imagine if the board of a successful resource company in B.C. said: "You know, let's do the fewest days of harvest this year and see how we do on our bottom line." Imagine if any enterprise tried to minimize the amount of effort that they put in.

We wouldn't see too many successful businesses. We wouldn't see the kind of thriving entrepreneurship that we have here in B.C. because of the spirit, the talent, the creativity, the tenacity and the hard-working attitude that British Columbians have. That's why we have successful businesses. We have businesses that are willing to go all out all the time. That's what makes us competitive.

This government sends a pretty clear message about productivity and competitiveness to all the businesses that operate here in the province. That message is crystal-clear. "We don't have to work hard. We don't have to tackle the issues. We don't have to listen to the 42 percent of people that were elected to serve communities around the province, to see what their input is. We don't have to be challenged by that. We can kick back."

Well, interestingly enough, the government rests on its laurels with business. The round table that this government sent out, the round table on small business, was out around the province, and there was a very interesting finding from that round table, specifically about deregulation and the reams of red tape that were cut by this government. It was very, very peculiar to note that 85 percent of those small businesses that came forward in the round table said: "You know what? We didn't notice. That deregulation didn't help us." How many years have we been hearing that 25, 30, 35 — is it even 40? — percent of the red tape was cut in this province?

How could it be that that much deregulation can take place and 85 percent of small businesses feel no change, no positive impact? How could this be? Could it be that all that rhetoric, all that sneaky deregulation, doesn't even show up on the ledgers of our small businesses? It defies the imagination that so much could be done and 85 percent don't even notice.

[1855]

It's interesting that we still have yet to have a substantive debate on the skills shortage in B.C. We have three days here, the last three days in 2006, in which we could talk about the impact of the skills shortage on the small businesses of B.C., never mind the big businesses. Let's talk about four years ago and the cuts that this government made to apprenticeship and training, the increases this government presided over on tuition, the end of the grants program.

Let's look at the impacts of this government's policies on post-secondary education and training and see.... Well, maybe if we absolutely devastate post-secondary education and training programs and support for students and encouraging the people of this province to get more education and training and pursue the career of their dreams.... If we hack that to bits, do you think it'll have any impact on businesses of B.C., particularly the small businesses that can't recruit from outside of B.C. or overseas?

It amazes me that this government, so-called friendly to business, proceeded on that course, and it doesn't surprise me in the least that our small businesses are in dire straits because of the skills shortage that this government has exacerbated for its five and a half years. It doesn't surprise me when the round table for small business goes out around the province and hears all they hear, repeatedly, from small businesses around the province. "We can't find the people. Where are the people? People don't have enough training. People don't have enough education to take these jobs. Our communities don't have the bodies."

It should come as no surprise to this government. They've been on a tear. We could spend the next few days debating how we put that back together best, how we serve the small and big businesses of this province with a robust post-secondary education and training program, a system that actually feeds our businesses and makes sure that there isn't an ongoing shortage. We're in big trouble on this front, and I hear repeatedly from the business community that this government doesn't want to talk about it. We're not going to talk about it, apparently, over these next three days if they pass this motion to adjourn.

So much for friendly to business. So much for supporting the businesses and rural communities adjacent to the B.C. parks where this government is pursuing, I guess you'd describe it as, an insider deal for lodges and resorts. What about the businesses in those communities that have existing business, established, servicing those parks? Do you think they have any issues around unfair competition? Do you think they have any issues around actually being consulted? Do you think they'd like to be involved in the process before the requests for proposals are going out and proponents' meetings?

Well, we could talk about this over the next several days. Most of those meetings have been cancelled. Most of the business people in those communities don't want to see the business they already have jeopardized. They aren't interested in supporting a process this government is foisting on them to privatize the parks on the inside rather than supporting the businesses and communities that make a difference on the outside of the parks and making sure that people have good access to our parks. There is a lot more this government could be doing to promote, to service, to improve access for citizens of B.C. into our parks. Apparently, that's not worth talking about either. It's status quo for limiting the access to the parks, and it's a whole new agenda for privatizing and

creating opportunities for the friends of the government.

Speaking of friends of the government, we should be talking about the softwood deal — the softwood sellout. I've heard from all kinds of businesses around this province — value-added business, lumber re-manufacturers — that are in serious trouble because of the softwood deal. This government.... They're for it; they're against it; now they're for it again. Now: "We'll never let it go up." Now: "We're for it. It's a good deal for B.C."

[1900]

It's not a good deal for the thousands of people who work adding value to the beautiful wood that comes out of our forests. Apparently, rather than debate that, rather than bring that into the Legislature to decide what is right.... Is the softwood deal a good deal? Rather than talking to the people who work in remanufacturing and value-added, let's just bully ahead with it, shall we? Let's just get 'er done. That's the attitude.

Let's increase raw log exports, too, while we're at it. Let's just fire them on out of here. There are lots of people that can make use of these. Besides, we need to cut those trees. They're dying faster than we can cut them.

That harkens back to that whole question about global warming. Why should we do anything about global warming? Global warming is making sure we can liquidate our forests faster than you can say child care.

Child care — how does that fit in this equation? Child care and small business. Do you think it's easy to start a business when you have little kids? Do you think it's a real bonus for an entrepreneur to have toddlers while they figure out how to launch a business, raise capital, hire people, sell their products, create jobs? Do you think it helps job creation to make sure that those entrepreneurs have to spend a good chunk of their waking hours looking after their kids too?

Well, some of us entrepreneurs were lucky. We had the opportunity to start businesses and create jobs and work our tails off because we had families who backed us up and could help raise the kids. We had extended communities that could do that. But there are a lot of entrepreneurs that don't have that luck, don't have that support.

When this government backs away from child care and doesn't stand up for all the people who fought for child care in this province, this government not only does the people and the kids of B.C. a disservice. It's a direct hit on small business in particular, where those people don't have the options. It just slows it all down. It slows down economic development, and I thought that's what this government was all about — good for business, good for economic development.

I've just skimmed the surface of the hypocrisy of this government saying that it's good for business. The kind of business this government is good for is a very narrow band. It's a very narrow band. It's a dinosaur economy.

It's a government that doesn't realize that the world is changing very, very quickly. They're doing nothing

to adapt to this. We could spend the next three days, and we would just barely be able to address the myriad issues related to change in our economy — the necessity for this government to take action and make fundamental changes on economic development and tax policy, to make critical changes to ensure that B.C. remains competitive and productive and actually leads the new economy forward, leads the world in emerging technologies and innovation.

Rather than skimping and scraping and not investing where they're told, where they're given plenty of opportunity by some of the most brilliant people in B.C., from academic institutions to entrepreneurs.... There are all kinds of opportunities. We don't have the opportunity to even address those here if we adjourn. We're going to have to leave that till next year.

Maybe a few of those opportunities go south in the meantime, where governments are actually in hot pursuit of economic development that is knowledge-based, green, ecologically sensitive — to an economy that recognizes what natural capital is, what social capital is. Somehow, those concepts haven't quite taken root here. This government is sliding on down the line into irrelevance in terms of economic relevance.

[1905]

There's got to be a balance of the resource economy and the knowledge-based economy here in B.C. That has to happen. It's bursting at the seams. If you go around the province right now, the kind of innovation that you see, the kind of genius that you see in this province should be supported in every which way.

It should be supported by government programs and policies rather than investing hundreds of millions of dollars in a non-renewable energy company for extraction, for maximizing, for accelerating the pace at which we liquidate our hard assets. Once they're gone, they're gone. That's it. Why would we accelerate the pace to get rid of assets that are increasingly valuable? Every day that goes by, every year that goes by, the value of natural gas, oil, methane and coal only increases. It gets more and more scarce on this planet.

We don't have the opportunity here, if we adjourn, to talk about the best way to do that. What programs should be in place? What should we be supporting? Where should the tax incentives be? How do they relate to the new economy and the knowledge-based economy? How does that balance with the resource economy? These are not questions that this government is allowing us to ask. These aren't answers, maybe, that the government wants to hear. They're not paying attention to this stuff. They're happy living in the past, and I suppose that at some point it'll catch up to them. Time waits for no one.

I would like to bring things back into my riding of Vancouver-Fairview, where, during the past couple of months with the House not sitting, there was some serious tragedy in a mental health facility called Hampton Court, very close to my home. This government was not sitting. I did not have the opportunity to raise the issue here in the House with the Minister of Health. I would still like to raise questions with the Minister of

Health about the decisions that this government made to close Hampton Court.

The opposition asked questions last spring about the future of Hampton Court and the reasons for closing down the facility. We did not get satisfactory answers. Since the government announced the closure in January of this year, three of the 16 residents have died, tragically. There are eight residents left at Hampton Court, wondering what their future holds.

They have a stay at this point. They're allowed to stay in the home through Christmas and New Year's, thankfully. But I beseech this government and this Health Minister to stand up for the people in Hampton Court, for the people in this province who face the day-to-day realities of mental illnesses and the challenges of that, the people that live on the streets of Vancouver and Victoria and many of the cities and towns around the province.

Whether they have multiple barriers or just have had a tough time in life, this government is not responsive; it does not care. They have the audacity to not sit this fall, to keep us out of here so that we can't ask the hard questions, can't look at what can be done better and can't stand up for the rights of people with mental health issues. There is no advocate for those people in this province anymore. We're it, and you won't even let us come here.

If we pass this motion, we won't be here for the next several days to talk about these issues and stand up for people living on the streets, people faced with mental illnesses. This is an abrogation of democracy and an abrogation of the government's responsibility to the citizens of B.C. It has been very painful for all of us, particularly the people that live at Hampton Court and the staff who work with them, to go through this, to only have the media who showed up to pay attention, thankfully, and to bring the story forward. We didn't have the opportunity to bring it to the government, and that is atrocious.

In closing, I would like to thank the Speaker....

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

[1910]

L. Krog: I never rise in this chamber without a sense of humility, conscious of the history that brought us to this place, conscious of the honour and the privilege that is bestowed upon each and every member of this House to represent the constituents who send them here as their voice. This didn't happen overnight — this right to speak in a parliament. It occurred over a long period of history fraught with battle and blood and the fight of many peoples to secure the right to representative democracy.

The Anglo-Saxon kings who preceded William of Normandy, who conquered England in 1066, used to engage in a council, and they would only pass laws after they sought the advice of that council. When William of Normandy conquered England and killed Harold Hardrada in that great battle that every English schoolchild learns about, things changed. Even then,

although William was an absolute monarch, he nevertheless would seek the advice of the council of his tenants-in-chief and ecclesiastic council before making laws.

Over time we know where that kind of absolute power led. It led to the barons of England running King John down at Runnymede on June 15, 1215, and forcing him to sign a charter. It wasn't the Magna Carta, the great charter. That comes a little later; some people aren't aware of that. After King John had signed it so reluctantly, he closed it with these wonderful words:

"It is accordingly our wish and command that the English church shall be free, and that men in our kingdom shall have and keep all these liberties, rights, and concessions, well and peaceably in their fullness and entirety for them and their heirs, of us and our heirs, in all things and in all places forever. Both we and the barons have sworn that all this shall be observed in good faith and without deceit."

So what did good King John do? He appealed to Pope Innocent III, who — only a couple of months later, on August 24, 1215 — issued a papal bull annulling the charter, the first of the charters that we recognize.

The history of this place relates back to those very events. In 1225 what we think of now as the great charter, the Magna Carta, was signed, and between that time and 1416 no less than 55 times was that recognized by the predecessor concept of what we call a parliament. It set out royal obligations, and it also set in place what this place must respect above all other things, and that is the rule of law.

In 1265 Simon de Montfort, the sixth Earl of Leicester, in rebellion against Henry III, summoned the first elected parliament without any royal authorization. That was a gutsy guy. By the time of Edward III, parliament indeed had two houses: one, the nobility and higher clergy; the other, the knights and the burgesses. The common people weren't quite there yet. That took a long period of time.

The power of the monarch really settled into its prime piece under Henry VIII. That was the peak of the power of monarchs in Britain. Of course, it was downhill from there for monarchy as we know it, and thank God for that. It led to a period where Charles I, rather unwisely opposing parliament, inspired a fellow called Cromwell and a great deal of other distressed English nobility and commoners. It led to his beheading.

[1915]

Monarchy returned. The people weren't ready to give it up. Following the Restoration, they ran into another king. He was forced to abdicate politely — Charles II. After that, a Protestant was invited to occupy the throne. From there through our history — and it is our history because it is the history of this very place — the rights and powers of the people and the common people in particular have increased and increased and increased.

It was the basis of the parliament that first sat in this country, after the formation of this country, before

there was a province of British Columbia. And all of those procedures and rules and changes occurred in order to expand the power of the people.

The Minister of Education said earlier today: "A tutorial is necessary for that member opposite." We listen at great length to the Minister of Health whenever he is asked a question. He wants to talk about history too. He wants to talk about the '90s. He never stops talking about the '90s. Why does he want to talk about the '90s? It's because he doesn't want to deal with the present. Because where are we in the present?

The history of this place and this province was not a pleasant one in many respects. It wasn't until 1972 that the words of the members of this House were recorded in a *Hansard*. It wasn't until 1972 that this place had a question period — the right of the opposition to question the executive council on any issue that the people thought fit.

This government, and I give them full credit, brought in a system of a fixed legislative session. Now, why was that? It's because they wanted to take into account the concerns of the families of the members who sit here. It would give the opportunity for people to know how long a session would last. It was a civilized reform. They managed that reform through a previous opposition when the members opposite on this side consisted of two lonely, energetic, hardworking members. It was good enough for the previous Legislature.

Here we are today in 2006, five years into this government's term. The opportunity for the people of this province to question the executive council and the members on the government side of this House has been taken away with an arrogance that is so unbecoming I can barely restrain my language. This is a government that has gone from election to arrogance without a comparable period of humility in between.

Tonight in my constituency, while dozens of my constituents sleep on the streets of Nanaimo, there will be nothing said of substance in this House about those people. It is absolutely shameful that this government in this place, in this time, after bringing in a fixed parliamentary session, should turn to the people of British Columbia and say: "There'll be no fall session, because it's busywork."

This is a government that does not want to operate within the bounds of democracy. There's an agreement signed between the province of Alberta and the province of British Columbia, negotiated in secret. It's called TILMA, the Alberta-British Columbia Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement, which many of my constituents believe will have a serious impact on environmental and labour standards in both provinces. It is the rush down to the lowest common denominator. We won't have a chance to discuss that here tonight or over the next three days, because this government wants to shut down probably the shortest legislative session in the history of British Columbia.

You know, the way politics works in this province is kind of like kids with a toybox. You've got this classroom, and the government is the kid with all the toys.

The rest of us on the opposite side — occasionally they let us play with a few toys.

[1920]

They demonstrate their maturity, sensitivity and compassion by allowing us a few things: the right to question cabinet ministers, the right to speak, the right to bring motions — all of those things. That's an opportunity given to us.

Tonight, as we approach the Christmas season, what the government has said is: "You're not playing in our toybox. We don't want to give you that opportunity. We don't think you deserve it. We don't think the problems of the people of British Columbia are worthy of legislative debate. We don't think the problems facing the people sleeping in the streets of Nanaimo, Ladysmith, Vancouver and Victoria tonight are worthy of legislative debate."

We have so many issues to discuss in this House — so many issues. I have listened with incredible pride to the comments of my fellow members on this side of the House, on the opposition side, who tonight have spoken about all kinds of issues that they would love to debate.

Let's talk about child poverty, as an example. You know, when the statistics first came out about one in four children in British Columbia living in poverty, the government's response to the minister responsible was: "Pooh-pooh. Well, that's an old statistic." Now the most recent statistics that have come out say that 23.5 percent of children in British Columbia are raised below the poverty line, which as the member for Vancouver-Quilchena said earlier — I believe it's Quilchena; I could be wrong — means that there are one in four families living in poverty. We'd like to talk about that on this side of the House, but we're not going to get that opportunity.

Homelessness. Senior citizens make up the fastest-rising homeless demographic in the province today. But what do we know? This government, this Liberal government, spends roughly the same amount of money on a webpage advertising campaign to promote work-life balance as they do for low-income housing.

What have we arrived at in this province? Is this the stage of democracy that throughout history we've worked to achieve? Is this the reason King John was run down at Runnymede by the barons: to arrive at a state where this province is enjoying the richest budgetary surpluses in its history and we're spending more on advertising telling people to live well than helping them to actually survive?

There are lots of things we could have spoken about in this session. We could have talked about Grant's law, to restrict sole workers at night and have better protection for employees at gas stations. Do we say to his family that what is important, a law that might have prevented the loss of their son's life, is not worthy of debate?

We could have said to the parents of this province.... Instead of saying through an advertising campaign, "Talk to your kids. Tell them to stay off crystal meth," we could have actually passed legislation to

limit the ability to buy the ingredients for what this government tells us is a terrible curse on our children, but we're not going to debate that either.

We could have dealt with legislation surrounding the payday loan industry. I don't think there is one member of this House who goes to an operation like that. We're all relatively well-paid. Statistically speaking, we are members of the elite in this province. But for those people earning six bucks an hour, or eight bucks an hour — if they've managed that onerous training period prescribed by government legislation in this province — those people do get forced to go to payday loan operations. Those are the people who pay the onerous interest rates. Those are the people who suffer. But this government doesn't care enough to call this House back to deal with a private member's bill that would address that very issue.

We could have worked on legislation to deal with the criminal-record checks for people working with children. It's a pretty non-partisan thing to do — isn't it? We could have done something as basic as bring legislation before this House for debate, or even a motion, surrounding the home inspection industry.

[1925]

Here we are in the midst of a real estate boom. There are thousands of homes changing hands in British Columbia every month, with the government reaping the reward of the sales tax on homes but not willing to recognize an industry and provide standards for it. When people for a couple of hundred bucks are making what for most of us is the single biggest investment of our lives and relying on the advice of those people, there are no industry standards. It is shocking, hon. Speaker.

But I want to talk about something that is closer to home for me and my constituency. I want to talk about the fact that in the numerous liquor establishments that have now become so common throughout this province under our so-called liberalized — and I use that word advisedly — liquor laws, the people who are hired as bouncers have no training. There are no standards. So the biggest, burliest, ugliest, dumbest, meanest ex-criminal can get hired in an establishment in this province and act as a bouncer. It's a pretty shocking circumstance. I'm reluctant to say more, because that issue is of importance in my community. There is a case before the courts now where, maybe, if that kind of regulation had existed, there would be a family on Gabriola Island who'd have a son there to celebrate Christmas with them.

Nanaimo enjoys the benefit of two ferry terminals — three, actually, if you include Duke Point out in Cedar — Departure Bay and the Gabriola ferry. My constituents are concerned about ferry rates.

Dozens of my constituents have just been ripped off in an investor fraud scheme. They would have liked me to have an opportunity to question the Attorney General about the lack of regulation. I have dozens and dozens of constituents who have no access to legal services, who require legal services, but that's not going to be addressed in this session, because we're not going have to have a session.

I'm conscious of the fact, and I say this with a tremendous sense of resignation, that there are 33 of us in opposition. The government has the majority. We will fight this motion. We will speak against it — all of us on this side of the House. We will raise our issues, but at the end of the day or the close of the night the government will win. The doors to this place, which they happily open to welcome a sports trophy, will be closed to all of those British Columbians who are sleeping in the streets tonight, who don't have enough money to raise their families with, who can't get in to a doctor and who are being asked to pay extra money to acquire reasonable health services that should be provided under the medical care this province is so proud of.

We could have talked about a clinic in Vancouver that's going to charge patients \$1,300 to jump the queue, but the doors to this place are closed to those people. The doors to this place are closed. "Come back in the springtime."

What's even more shocking is the contempt that this government shows for this House. The Premier of this province announces he's going to increase the housing portion for people on social assistance. Does he announce it in the Legislature? Does he announce it here to the people of British Columbia, to the elected representatives of the people of British Columbia? No. He announces it in a forum where it does him some political good.

[1930]

The real arrogance of it is that as we sit here all warm and toasty tonight in this place, there are thousands of our fellow citizens on the streets of British Columbia wondering if they're going to survive the night, knowing full well that when that paltry housing allowance increase is brought in, the landlords of this province are simply going to do what they've always done whenever the rates are increased. They're going to bump up the rent. This isn't about helping poor people, and we will have no opportunity to debate that this fall either.

As I said when I commenced tonight, I never rise in this House without a sense of humility. But I must say tonight the feeling of disgust I have in my heart for this government, for all of the things that it will fail to address by cancelling the fall session and by limiting the debate, is something I haven't felt in a very long time. I say shame on this government, shame on this Premier, shame on the executive council for sitting there opposite and lecturing the opposition about history when the history of this period is written. When history looks back and looks at these huge budgetary surpluses and looks at how we treated the poorest and weakest amongst us — those without voice — I'm just glad that I'm on this side of the House at this time instead of on that side of the House, because I wouldn't want history's judgment visited on me.

In the introduction to a wonderful book called *The Story of Parliament* there is a quote by the Rt. Hon. Baroness Boothroyd. She was the Speaker of the Mother of all Parliaments for eight years, and this is what she

said: "The function of Parliament is to hold the executive to account. That is the role for which history has cast the Commons. It is the core task of members. It is in Parliament in the first instance that ministers must explain and justify their policies. This is the chief forum of the nation today, tomorrow and, I hope, forever."

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Clearly, this government does not believe this is the chief forum. This government believes the chief forum is cabinet. This government believes in secrecy. This government's arrogance has been demonstrated time and time again. The epitome of that arrogance is the fact that this place will be shut in a matter of hours, notwithstanding all the pressing problems that have been raised so ably by my fellow members on this side of the House. This place will shut, and we will not see its doors open until the spring. It is shameful. The members opposite should be ashamed, the Premier should be ashamed and the people of British Columbia should be ashamed for having given power to this government that would act in this way, notwithstanding a reform that was brought in with a fixed sitting schedule.

I say it is time for them to consider their position, consider the judgment of history in this place and reconsider what they wish to do by shutting down the opportunity for those of us elected to speak for the people of British Columbia — to speak on their behalf in this place — which is the result of hundreds of years of history.

J. Brar: The people of Surrey-Panorama Ridge elected me not for sitting in my office and attending ribbon-cutting ceremonies. The people of Surrey-Panorama Ridge elected me to stand up for them in this House and debate their issues. They elected me to ask tough questions on issues important to them. They elected me to hold this government to account. Therefore, I join the member of this side of the House to oppose this motion in front of this House.

[1935]

Last Saturday I woke up at about five o'clock. When I looked out the window of my house, I saw a heavy snowfall. At five o'clock I went out and drove to the Front Room. The Front Room is a place where homeless people come just to stay for the night. I saw over 60 people sitting in that room on chairs just to spend the night. There were more people outside that room who had no place to even go in and sit on a chair that night.

This government is saying that there's no issue to debate; there's no issue to talk about. There are issues in the province.

The homelessness since this government took over has become a huge provincewide problem. As we know as per the last count, the number of homeless people in British Columbia has doubled, and in Surrey the number has gone up 140 percent.

I met the officials of the Surrey food bank. They told me they serve about 40,000 people every month,

and 40 percent of those people are families with children. That's the situation out there, and this government is saying that they are not prepared to debate those issues.

Basically, this government is saying they don't care about the issues, about the most vulnerable people of the province — the poor, the children and the seniors.

The Premier had the courage to stand up at the UBCM convention and make a statement that the shelter allowance in fact is low and that something needs to be done. But the Premier is not in this House to debate this very important, timely, sensitive issue that we need to be talking about during the next three days to support those people who have no place to sleep.

The issue of income assistance is also very important. What we have been hearing from people across the province is that the rates for income assistance at this point in time are very, very low. They're not even close to what people need. One single person on income assistance gets only \$6 per day. I want to know from any member of the other side of the House if they can survive for one single day on \$6 per day. I need to know that answer. The answer will be no.

I met a single mother just two days ago. This mother is very talented, very pleasant, and has lots of skills and has one son who has a cancer. What she told me is that all the money she gets on income assistance goes for rent. She has nothing for food. That's the situation out there with not one family but thousands of families in the province. She has to go and beg for food from different places.

That's the situation. That's the issue we should be talking about. There are a lot of people out there who expect us, all the elected officials of this province, to talk about those issues and find creative ways to deal with those issues as quickly as possible.

Even during the UBCM, the mayor of Kelowna and the mayor of this city, Victoria, had the courage to stand up in a church that is just walking distance from this place and ask the provincial government to take action on income assistance, to take action to address the issue of homelessness. The government, which is actually responsible to deal with those issues, is shutting down this House and is not prepared to discuss and debate those issues.

What it means, basically, is that this government does not care about the poor people. This government does not care about the most vulnerable people in the province.

[1940]

Just last week I visited a church in the riding of Surrey-Cloverdale. We have a member here who comes from that riding. That is a church where they provide a soup kitchen to people who can't afford food. What I've been told is that in that particular church, there are a number of people who come to that church as single mothers and people who are on income assistance. They don't have enough money to buy food. So that is happening in that riding. I wish the member from that riding would stand up in this House and speak for those people, rather than saying that we don't

have any issue and we need to shut down this House. That is a shame, Madam Speaker.

This government made significant legislative changes in 2001, particularly to save money on the backs of the most poor people in the province. What they did is change the rules of income assistance to make it tough, basically, for those people to access income assistance. One of the rules they made is that people can get only two years out of five years. I have a number of people who have become homeless because they have reached their time limit.

They also made the rule that they have to meet a two-year independence test before they go on income assistance. There are many young people in foster care homes who are not able to meet the test, and they are out there on the street and becoming homeless.

Surprisingly, this government supports people to go to work and find work. One of the rewards for that which was there already to assist those people was the earning exemptions, which were available to the people of British Columbia on income assistance. This government under that legislation even took that away from the people, which in my opinion is the key incentive for the people on income assistance to move to the next level, find a part-time job, start earning some money and then move on to full-time jobs. That is a shame on this government.

We need to be debating those issues. Again, by shutting down this House, this government is sending a clear message out there that they don't care about the most vulnerable people in British Columbia.

The other issue during the last month, a very important issue which we have been talking about, is the job placement program issue. Now, the job placement program was designed to assist people on income assistance to find meaningful jobs. That program has been going on for the last almost five years, and hundreds of millions of dollars have gone to, particularly, two Liberal-friendly firms under this program. It was very surprising and shocking for me to find out that this government paid \$19 million just to close that program and hand over the same program to the same organizations the next day. In other words, they paid \$19 million severance pay to those big companies that they have very good connections with.

We have been asking questions to the minister responsible, the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance, and the minister has absolutely refused to answer any questions. The people of British Columbia want answers. The opposition on this side wants answers, but the minister is refusing to answer. This is the only place we can ask those tough questions, and the government is shutting down this House basically to avoid all the questions opposition has to ask the minister and the other ministers as well.

There were two brave women who came forward. Let me tell you their story, Madam Speaker. One of them is a teacher who found a job herself. She was asked by one of the companies to sign a document which states that actually, the company found the job for her. If she signs that document, the company will

get \$4,300 as a bonus because they, in their turn, were helpful in finding a job for her.

[1945]

That lady refused to sign the document. She was so courageous that she came out and spoke to the people of British Columbia about the situation, but the minister is silent about that. He is not providing any answer to the people of British Columbia.

Another young lady who came forward found a job herself, as well, but she was asked to sign the document. She was offered \$100 to sign the document, which she signed. She got \$100, and these companies got thousands of dollars because of that for the job they never did.

That's the program, and we have been asking questions and questions, and the media has been asking questions and questions. The only response we got from the minister is shutting the door when the media approached the minister. Those are the questions we want to ask the government, the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance. He needs to provide the answer to the people of British Columbia whether he has any respect for the money, the taxpayer dollars, the people of British Columbia or not. He is again hiding somewhere and not providing the answer to the people of British Columbia.

There are issues in my own riding we want to debate in this House, which are time-sensitive, important, urgent issues. The issue of Surrey Memorial Hospital we all know about. This government, during the middle of the election, came out and made the announcement that they were going to fast-track the study so that they could take quick action. That was the announcement the Premier of this province made during the middle of the election standing in the middle of the city of Surrey and showing his commitment.

After the election, the response was total inaction. They did fund a report to find out what needs to be done. The report was done, and recommendations were made. According to those recommendations, the construction of the ambulatory care centre was to start in the year 2007.

It was shocking for me, it was shocking for all the people of Surrey-Panorama Ridge and it was shocking for the people of Surrey that the Premier went from here to Surrey to announce that the construction of that project was being postponed for one year. We need answers to those questions as well as to why the people of Surrey are being ignored by this government time and again.

Now there's a new development. A private clinic, a private hospital, is coming up in Surrey. The private people are acting on it, but this government is sleeping on the issue when we know that Surrey Memorial Hospital, particularly the emergency room, is serving over capacity — 60 percent over capacity than the number of patients it can serve.

Just a few months ago I had my own experience. I took my mother, who is 86, to the hospital. I was sitting in the emergency for six hours. After six hours my mother told me: "I cannot sit any longer." So we had to come back without seeing any doctor.

This government and the members sitting on the other side of the House who also come from Surrey are saying that that issue is not important, that we don't need to debate that issue. Those are the issues we need to be debating in this House. That's why we need to continue until the term of this session, which is four more days.

Youth violence is another issue which is very important to the people of Surrey and the people of British Columbia. By the way, the government organized the provincial public safety congress about a year and a half ago. In that congress for half of the day, the debate was about the youth gangs. That is the size of the issue we're talking about.

Just two days ago the committee working on that issue, having reviewed all the reports, put together one report. I was present, and the hon. Attorney General was present at that meeting as well. They have made final recommendations to act on.

[1950]

We need to ask through debate what will the action be of this government to act on those recommendations from which the community has collectively come together finally. We don't know at this point in time what the action of the government will be. We need to ask those questions. That's why we need to continue in this House for the next four days.

Seniors safety is another issue. As you know, two seniors were killed at Bear Creek Park. Just a few days ago that case went to trial, and there was a decision made. Of course, the families and the whole community were certainly not satisfied with the decision.

We the opposition stood up and asked the Crown to appeal that decision. We also asked the Attorney General. We also asked the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General to act in the same way so that those families can finally get the justice they need. The government has been silent on those issues.

Again, this is the place where we want to ask those questions. The government is not allowing us to ask those questions by shutting down the House.

Similarly, domestic violence has been a huge issue in the Indo-Canadian community. About a month ago, as you know, two young ladies were killed. The whole community came out, and they spoke out very honestly. They talked about the issues we face in the community, and they spoke out very clearly about what the challenges are in the community. I was shocked, again, when I heard the Attorney General of this province saying the only way we can solve this problem is that the victims have to become witnesses, and then the problem will be solved.

I want to tell the hon. Attorney General that without providing them the appropriate support, those women will never come out and become witnesses because that is the environment they live in. The Attorney General has been silent about that. We need to ask those questions. That's why we need to continue the proceedings of this House so that we can ask those questions.

The Patullo Bridge is another issue which is very important. As you know, over a dozen people have been killed on that bridge because of heavy traffic. In the last session the opposition has been demanding to put speed cameras on that. The response from the minister has been no.

However, after the opposition brought this issue to this House, the city of Surrey's council supported the idea. The RCMP and the people of Surrey supported the idea, but this government says no action is needed. We need some rationale on that. We need to ask those questions to this government, and that's why we need to continue the proceedings of this House.

This nation supports global activities to establish democracy on the other side of the globe. I wholeheartedly support that initiative of this nation because we believe in democracy, because we love democracy, because we teach democracy to our kids. But it is shocking for me that this government is not respecting the democracy of this House, which has been established by their own rules. That is shocking for me as well.

I would like to conclude by saying that shutting down this House is nothing more than complete arrogance. It is nothing more than that they are not willing to listen to the people of British Columbia. It is nothing more than that they don't care about the important issues the people of British Columbia are facing. It is nothing more than that they are not prepared to listen to the people of British Columbia.

This side of the House wants to continue talking about people's issues. I am totally surprised that no one from the other side stood up and said anything about the issues that people are facing in their communities. That is shocking. They have been elected by the people of British Columbia to bring the issues of people, to talk in this House, to find solutions and help people so that we can build this beautiful province of British Columbia.

[1955]

G. Gentner: I rise to speak against the motion to adjourn this sitting of the Legislature. Madam Speaker, the motion to adjourn is one of shackling the very nature of our democracy, a system that, though not perfect, allows representatives of this province to assemble and debate and bring forward bills, motions, budgets, petitions, statements and, above all, question period for the opposition.

I begin by thinking about what's lacking here today. It is the bright young faces of the Pages. They go through a training at school. They look forward to coming here. It's a learning process.

I also miss the children from my constituency who visit us when we're in session. They come here to see hollow chambers, asking questions: "Well, what does the government do?"

I miss some of the lobby groups that come visit the Legislature to talk to members opposite and, of course, ourselves. They even go through, many times, having a mini-convention or a meeting here because we are here as well.

It does have a direct economic benefit to Victoria as well. There is a multiplier effect with our presence here. The whole purpose of creating a fall session was that during the busy summer season when the vacationers were here, the prices were quite prohibitive when we were hosting long summer sessions. The idea was to move it into the fall — save some costs. But at the same time, there was a culture here that people looked forward to.

This is a very arrogant government, a government that holds in contempt the values that we hold so dear. I also recently attended a school in Surrey to listen to a debating contest with all the grades 4, 5, 6 and 7, and it was quite remarkable to see them debate. It was quite impressive, the oratorical skills.

I did get a question from one child. She asked why it is that we're not here. I blustered and really couldn't explain it properly. There is a culture within our children, within ourselves. Throughout British Columbia there is an expectation that we should be here.

This heartless government believes that there were no reasons really to call the Legislature back except, of course, to finally appoint the long-overdue child and youth protection officer. There are many pertinent issues that really need addressing, but the government lacks the fortitude to see this. That is the question which the government has been unwilling to answer.

It is an interesting concept, providing you accept the notion that history is motionless and change in our society is negligible and, therefore, intervention is needless. This government is an experiment. In its zealous ideology, it cut social services, deregulated, restructured, privatized, and in the midst of this near-sighted agenda, it wilfully dismantled our child protection system.

All members were called back to the Legislature last week because the government had to fix the chaos the Premier and his government had created by shutting down the independent office of the children's commissioner in June of 2002 and, by fall of the same year, repealing the Children's Commission Act and the Child, Youth and Family Advocacy Act. The responsibility for child death reviews was handed over to the coroner's office. However, that office was cut by 15 percent.

[2000]

We are here today — and we quite rightly assisted the government, who finally saw the error of its own dogma — in order to fix its laissez-faire framework for social structures. It is as though this government was stuck in some kind of time warp, somewhere in 19th century non-interference policy-making, in a policy that applauded the notion that victims, including helpless children, could fend for themselves and everything is best left alone.

I bring this to your attention because this overwhelming attitude is still the prevailing creed of the present Liberal government. The minimalist approach pervades every action — or, I should say, inaction of this government. The government must take its head out of the sand and look at the landscape before it, because change is inevitable.

Change. Some is good and some is bad, but the world, and even British Columbia, is witnessing changes every day. Some change is so severe that this government has no social right to turn its back on it because of a lacklustre method to address the severe implications, such as what we've seen with the Ministry of Children and Family Development.

The government's lax and nonsensical approach is that when you let the cattle guzzle enough oats, something will go through for the sparrows. We know this philosophical notion has failed — countless. Every time it has been tried, it has been a recipe for disaster and, I may add, a messy one at that.

Let's put it this way. The rise in population and global warming, the acceleration of technology, the concentration of wealth and power, are all linked, forcing harsh changes not only for British Columbia but the world itself. I ask you: what smug government thinks that it can simply turn its back on history and reality itself, and has the audacity to say that there is no need to assemble the people's representative because it's busywork?

Where is the government going? Does it really know? This government is rudderless. Why wouldn't the government call the Legislature back on October 2? The opposition was here. We were waiting.

Does this government truly believe that there were no pertinent issues before us to face? Or could it be that this government has lost the tenacity? Or perhaps it has lost its own purpose? The government has no proclivity to take the lead. This side of the House is most willing to take the lead to address the issues, needs and policies of British Columbians.

How much longer can the government go on without an effective strategic plan for the pine beetle epidemic? The most immediate danger posed by climate change is weather instability, causing uncertainty in my community and the province. Droughts, floods, and fires are rising in frequency and severity. In February of last year many coastal communities experienced a significant storm combining a one-metre storm surge with a high tide that caused widespread damage to low-lying residential and agricultural communities.

On March 2 the Delta mayor, Lois Jackson, wrote the Premier and federal Minister of Environment regarding the need for enhanced flood protection in order to protect her community. She responded again on May 4. Still no response. However, she did hear, ironically enough, from the federal Minister of Environment, who responded with the strategic infrastructure fund as a program Delta and the province may want to consider. Unfortunately, on July 11 the Solicitor General of British Columbia officially denied Delta any financial assistance.

Now, before the flood season on September 20, the mayor tried once again, only to hear after this year's recent storm on November 9 that the Solicitor General was willing to "continue to keep the issue of flood mitigation moving forward towards, some day, a viable solution."

[2005]

Now, those are empty words — empty words and empty deeds, with no opportunity to raise such important issues with a compressed question period. We've only had three. The government is inconvenienced to have had to extend the session so the opposition could raise questions in order to make British Columbia a better place.

Why must British Columbians wait till next year for any shred of hope that the government has a strategic plan to address flooding in coastal communities? How many people must lose their homes and wade in water and muck before this provincial government opens the doors to these chambers so we can have an open discussion on these changes — changes that the government does not want to discuss, changes that have forced a boil-water order for more than half a million people for one week?

When will this brutal government begin to recognize the inconvenient truth of climate change? How much more damage to property and people's lives must be endured before this government will begin to act? What catastrophic event will it take to trigger the obvious — that this government has to take leadership and stop relying on a strategy of downloading responsibilities onto local communities and municipalities that can no longer afford it?

Not in my wildest dreams did I think that the number-one issue walking into my constituency office would be that of maltreated Workers Compensation claimants. We have a crisis in this province, and this vindictive government has to become aware of the repercussions of changing the act, which it did four years back.

Many of my constituents are enduring severe hardship. Had the doors of these chambers been open when they were supposed to be, on November 2, the victims of this horrible legislation — their voices, letters and stories — could have been heard. Contrary to what many on the government side of the House believe, WorkSafe B.C. has been a complete sham. There's no strong insurance for the injured, and there was no attempt to open the chamber doors this fall.

Again, the number-one case that walks into my office is Workers Compensation. I'm talking about hard-working, honest and proud individuals who have had the misfortune to suffer a work-related injury or disease. These individuals, who have tried everything and have exhausted all appeals, are now coming to their MLA as a last resort.

I'm quite certain that many of these cases are a direct result of the change that occurred in 2002 under the Liberal government. Most of these changes were based on recommendations of the Alan Winter report on Workers Compensation legislation and policy, which was commissioned in September of 2001.

We have another dilemma that has to be dealt with now, a situation where the Premier must come out of the woodwork and face the music. We need a session to discuss the systematic destruction of our public health system. The Premier created his dog-and-pony show, or what the throne speech described as the gov-

ernment's Conversation on Health. But did anyone except the executive council know that it meant suspending the Legislature to do so? The government wants to forgo real conversation in this House regarding its agenda and to privatize our medical system.

It is outrageous for the Minister of Health to suggest that he only heard of a private emergency clinic last Thursday, November 23. He blames his former deputy minister for not briefing him on the opening of the for-profit emergency facility called the urgent care centre at False Creek.

The Health Ministry was informed of the intent last January, and it could easily be construed why this callous government was reluctant to bring the House back for a fall sitting. Clearly, it does not want to talk about its agenda of credit card and cash register emergency rooms. It is simply unconscionable.

I bring this to our attention because this devious and sleazy government will tolerate more private emergency clinics, including Surrey Memorial Hospital. My constituents use Surrey Memorial Hospital.

[2010]

Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, member.

G. Gentner: My neighbours are working people.

Deputy Speaker: Member, take your seat, please.

Point of Order

Hon. T. Christensen: Point of order. The members on this side.... We're big boys and girls, and we can stand here and listen to the member. But there are rules around parliamentary language. The member is pushing the limits at best. I would certainly ask that the member withdraw his most recent remark in terms of the motives of the government. We all in this House come here with the best of motives in terms of serving our constituents. It is certainly unparliamentary, I would suggest, for the member to suggest otherwise.

Deputy Speaker: Member, I find the language unparliamentary. Would you like to withdraw it?

G. Gentner: Madam Speaker, I do so, with apologies to the offended member across.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Debate Continued

G. Gentner: My constituents use Surrey Memorial Hospital. My neighbours are working people who already have unbearable waiting times, only to discover that the Liberal government's proposed two-tier health system will force those who cannot afford the front line to endure even longer waits in the public system. We know why the emergency expansion has been delayed for British Columbia's fastest-growing area. It is because of an agenda to enter into a P3 approach with a

for-profit emergency centre at Surrey Memorial Hospital.

My constituents say no. My constituents work very hard. They raise families. They spend time and money to bring up children, and they participate in their community. After a full day's work and financing a life within an ever-increasing suburban environment within one of the more expensive areas to live in North America, they find a way of getting by, paying taxes and increased utility bills. Those taxes are paid, expecting that health services will be delivered. They cannot afford much more.

Working people cannot continue to carry the weight of more incompetence caused by cuts to our number-one priority called public health care. It is time we acknowledged our hard-working citizens and stopped this extra tax called user fees and privatized health care. We have seen the British experiment into the market-style medical service. The government there has realized its own failures. The National Health Service suffered from decades of underfunding that began during the strangulation by deep cuts imposed by then Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Critics were able to point to long wait-lists and aging hospitals.

The need there — and same with here as well — is for an increase in funding for front-line care. In Britain we've seen the establishment of private independent-sector treatment centres that cost 40 percent more than the public National Health Service. The private clinic cherry-picks the contracted government income-assistance patients that are the simple cases. They pass on the complicated and follow-up patients to the public service plan. After visiting Europe, the Premier has adopted the myth behind the European model.

In my community, Gateway is another reason we should be here. Gateway South Fraser perimeter road is a major focus point because it runs right through my constituency and because the outcomes will greatly change North Delta. The government doesn't see it that way, of course. It has blinders on. It is fixed on its position. It will not consider all viable options before it.

The assembly needs an open debate regarding what exactly the Premier has in mind for Delta, the Fraser Valley and beyond, throughout the province. He has just returned from the Orient, and his vision of globalization means building asphalt to accommodate the convoy of container trucks rolling off Deltaport. We need a larger discussion to explore what he has in store, what this thoughtless Liberal government is possibly headed towards.

[2015]

Another reason why we should meet here for most of the session is not for busywork but for an opportunity to discuss what the Ministry of Transportation has in mind for my community. The government has a plan to spend \$1 billion in infrastructure improvements, while the federal government is considering consolidating ports on the lower mainland — the eventual merging of the Vancouver Port Authority with that of the Fraser Port Authority, amalgamation that will move regional trucking not on the proposed South

Fraser perimeter road that this government is going to be spending so much money on, per se, but along the Fraser River as its future highway.

True enough, national continental movements will be using Prince Rupert and the Vancouver Port Authority. This means improved rail capacity will pour concrete from Deltaport to Hope. This is not to suggest that there is a need for sustainable highway improvements. Without discussing the implications of what is proposed in this House, with all options available, the government plan is indeed shortsighted.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

It is also what the outcomes of South Fraser perimeter road will do to our farmland. We'd like to discuss the 83 hectares or more that will be compromised and will be removed from the agricultural land reserve as a result of this proposal. This is heady stuff. This is the beginning of the end of a fragmented agricultural land base in Delta, and there has been no discussion of any compensation levels, any replacement, a two-for-one. It has certainly been wiped right off the map of discussion.

The local government has asked for proper overpasses for farmers to cross the new freeway being created by the government. The government has not responded. We have the road slicing off parts of Burns Bog — a commitment by this government to preserve in its entirety — and yet nothing at all has been brought forward in this House.

In my community there are 200 residential properties that will be impacted; 83 — or, the government can tell you, 150 — could be completely wiped right out. The heritage communities of Sunbury and Annieville will be nuked, and there has been no dialogue or discussion on the implications of what that means in this House.

The government, with the federal government, has partnered with the third-berth expansion at Deltaport. There is a harmonized framework of the two environmental assessment offices. There is really no assessment of all projects' cumulative approach and impacts to the region. It was as though it didn't matter what the impacts were going to be. There's no major discussion, per se, or guarantee that freighters and ships docking off Deltaport would be prohibited from using diesel bunker fuel, creating particulate for the GVRD airshed. None of this discussion has had its proper place in this House.

The environmental assessment of 1979 found that the significance of the Fraser River estuary was unique in North America and concluded that the plans for port expansion at Roberts Bank posed unacceptable threats to the ecosystem. No reminder in this House of what that means to the Fraser River or the Sand Heads. This area, together with Boundary Bay and Sturgeon Bank, ranks as the number-one site in Canada as an important bird area and is designated a hemispheric site in the Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network.

[2020]

This critical habitat is Canada's most important stopover for the migratory birds of the Pacific Flyway and has the most important salmon river in the world. The area is used regularly by endangered, resident southern killer whales. It has been planned as the Roberts Bank wildlife management area for over ten years. Again, the government has kept its head in the sand.

Last spring I introduced an amendment to the B.C. Utilities Commission that could be called upon now, but it's been ignored. People are waiting, once again, with some resolve. They were promised that this bill or something like it could assist the people of Delta. Now the bill stipulates that proposed high-voltage transmission lines located within the vicinity of settled areas, parks, recreational areas, residential areas, private and public schools, child play facilities and playgrounds would come under immense scrutiny under provincial law.

The bill mandates the Utilities Commission to weigh adverse effects, including electromagnetic fields and all policies concerning public health and safety. The mandate of the B.C. Utilities Commission must move forward and reflect the 21st century with a strengthened triple-bottom-line approach. This bill spells out new stringent siting criteria for overhead electrical transmission lines with a capacity of 345 kilovolts within a residential neighbourhood.

We must recognize the threat of EMF to public health. In many jurisdictions legislation has tightened up EMF regs. The bill directs the Utilities Commission to consider keeping high-voltage transmission lines away from residential areas and states that any proposal to increase the voltage of transmission facilities within residential areas would automatically trigger a review to see if a viable alternative can be found.

There are many reasons why we should be here to discuss the issues of the province. In my constituency a major issue is victims of crime — something this government has got to address.

This Legislature operates on our parliamentary system of government in which the executive, the Premier and cabinet are constitutionally answerable to the parliament. This is not the United States, with a presidential system that is separate and does not form part of a legislature. Knowing this, I would like to welcome the Premier back to British Columbia, which has a chamber where he, like all of us, is answerable to the people of British Columbia through its representative assembly. During this debate we have heard the thoughts of the Premier, an office which is the largest of its kind per capita in the country.

I'll end by saying I am opposed to adjourning the Legislature because it is a suppression of opposition, and the suppression of opposition, I believe, is a conspiracy of silencing parliamentary democracy. Regarding squashing opposition in his 1950 message to the U.S. Congress, Harry Truman stated: "Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear."

This Legislature operates under a parliamentary system of government in which the executive, the Premier and cabinet are constitutionally answerable to the parliament. This is, again, not the United States.

I want to end by going back to the children. I want to remind everybody in this House that when you look in the eyes of children and you tell them why we're here and what their expectations truly are, you can tell them why you did not hold a full session for this fall.

[2025]

R. Austin: I rise today to speak against this motion and to register the anger in my riding from the many people who felt disgust that this House was not recalled according to the fixed calendar that this government brought into place. As I have stated before in this House, I believe that the fixed calendar is a better way to conduct the people's business, as both citizens and people who work in government and around here can know ahead of time how they can have their voices heard and how issues of importance to all regions of this province can be brought before the House.

In my riding of Skeena there are many issues that constituents expect me to talk about and, more importantly, expect this government to be acting on. Earlier today there were questions about rural school closures and the detrimental effect that this government has had on rural school districts, which have to enact the provisions of Bill 33 without any specific funding being added to the school districts' budgets.

Fully one in five classrooms in school district 82 is not in compliance with Bill 33, as there are more than three students with IEPs in those classes. Nothing is being done about this. The school district's response is: "We believe the current learning conditions present in our district are acceptable within the given parameters of resources available." One in five classes is out of compliance with the law, but that apparently is acceptable.

I'm not here to cast aspersions as to the competence of school district officials, as I do not believe this is in their ability to control. Note once again, hon. Speaker, that these learning conditions are only deemed acceptable by district staff given the parameters of resources available. In other words, they know they cannot comply with the law but are doing their very best with the money that has been sent from Victoria.

I cannot tell you how many individuals have confronted me with poor learning conditions in schools in school district 82. I hear from parents who have children with special needs, who wonder why their children have an IEP but not the services to fully comply with that IEP. I hear from parents of other children, who wonder how a teacher is supposed to provide all that is asked of teachers when they have to work with multiple students who have special needs, as well as taking care of providing the curriculum to those regular students. On top of this, we in Skeena all have to undergo a four-day school week — this in the best province to live on earth and the place where we can spend \$600 million to widen a road to a ski hill for the 2010 Olympics.

We all want to be excited about the Olympics. But what do I say to people in my riding who question how it is that in a province that is undergoing an economic boom, we cannot find even an extra \$1 million to put 7,000 children back into a five-day school week while at the same time we can spend hundreds of millions of dollars to put on a great Winter Games?

Of course, in northwest B.C. we are far from in an economic boom, and this government seems content to do nothing about it. Instead, this government decides to approve the softwood lumber agreement with the U.S., which allows them to keep a billion dollars of money that came from communities like Terrace so that the Americans can use this money to pay for lawyers to get the next legal challenge going. What percentage of that money could have been used to help communities that are struggling within the forestry sector?

Members of the Finance Committee recently visited Terrace, and many people spoke at that time. In particular, there was a presentation about what could be done to assist the forestry sector make investments until the profiles of our forests improve and recover. We know that the cost of removing wood from a forest sector that has a high profile of pulp-quality fibre is not economic, especially when having to compete with the bug wood that is being taken down in the interior.

Surely some of those dollars that are being returned as part of the softwood lumber agreement could be used to set up an intensive silviculture program to manage second-growth stands or to upgrade the roads that have not been maintained as a result of the downturn in the forest sector. I think that would be a good thing for this government to be working on, instead of closing down the Legislature after only three days of work.

[2030]

We have been trying in my home community to get a shelter for youth going. We have a transition house for women and children who are escaping domestic violence, and we have a men's emergency shelter, but for youth under the age of 19 we have nothing. The emergency shelter was set up after the death of an individual, and my fear is that a youth will have to freeze to death on the streets of Terrace before this government acts in this regard.

There is support for this youth shelter from people of all walks of life and across all political boundaries. I've spoken in person to the Minister of Children and Family Development, but I have no answer. I would have liked to continue asking questions about where this proposal stands. This morning it was below minus 20 degrees in Terrace, so I would think that this issue is of great importance to local people and certainly, once again, would not fall under the category of busywork.

Not only has there been no support for our forestry sector, but I see another local public resource that is being given away at the expense of local citizens. I'm speaking about water, specifically the water that drives the generators of Kemano.

While this Legislature has been closed, it has been the fervent hope of this government that they could

sneak through a deal between B.C. Hydro and Alcan that would allow Alcan to run to the bank with hundreds of millions of dollars in windfall profits by selling electricity back to British Columbians at \$71 a megawatt for power that costs less than \$5 to produce. We gave a river to a company, and then we buy electricity back from that company at 1,200-percent profit while allowing the company to break its long-held agreement to use that electricity for industrial purposes. Once again an important public resource is being squandered at the expense of people in the north who are desperate for jobs.

We started today to question this Hydro-Alcan agreement, and if this House were open, we would continue to do this. Frankly, the whole deal stinks. When you think of how much money is at stake, one wonders where the government is at as it sacrifices northwest B.C. to help out the shareholders of a private company.

Once again we are seeing a massive public resource being given away with no benefit to British Columbians. It isn't even good for all the customers of B.C. Hydro, who are going to be paying way too much for a product that is coming from a hydro project that was built over 50 years ago. Unlike the other electricity that is being offered from IPPs under Hydro's call for new power, the deal is not bringing on new electricity but is taking power that was designated for industrial purposes, thus reducing long-term employment in my riding.

My constituents would also like me to be questioning the government on health issues, as this is one of the greatest challenges for those who live in the northwest. Most decisions are now made in Prince George, and people feel that it is hard to get local matters brought into the equation when spending health dollars. Access continues to be a huge problem, as does the expense of medications for many, especially the elderly who are on fixed incomes.

If we were here in this House longer, I would like to add many questions to the debate on the changes that have been made to WCB — or WorkSafe B.C. as it is now known. Workers in Skeena have told me that the contract between workers and families and the companies that employ them has been turned on its head.

It appears that WCB payments that are taken off people's paycheques each week are like insurance premiums made to the Acme insurance company before the days when the insurance industry was regulated. You have to make a premium payment. It is, after all, the law. But when there is an accident, the insurance company has no intention of ever paying back any money to those who have been injured.

I have over 200 families being treated this way. Some have been bankrupted and had their lives literally destroyed. To me, this is not busywork but valuable work allowing ordinary people to have their voices heard.

I want to raise the issue of child care and the concern in my communities of day cares that are in danger

of closing due to the inability of this government to press the federal government to live up to its past obligations. Letters have gone out to parents letting them know that many of the day care centres will close in the new year or after this school year as there is no core funding to subsidize the running of these centres.

Finally, we have one of the highest rates of people living on social assistance, who have not seen a raise in years, yet the costs of living have gone up dramatically. If we were here, we could continue to press this government on making changes to income assistance which recognize that everybody deserves a basic level of living, even if it is a subsistence living as defined by this government — surely one of the most arrogant and heartless governments in B.C. history.

These and many more topics should be before the House, and this could only be done if we were here doing the people's business.

[2035]

M. Sather: I rise in this House to speak against this motion to adjourn. As my colleagues have outlined, it's not the time yet for us to be adjourning this House. We're just getting started, thanks to this government who chose not to call the House into session this fall, for the first time since they've been elected, for the first time since they brought in the agenda. That is a good idea; a calendar is a good idea for the way that we conduct our business in this House. But for some reason this government chose not to meet this fall, this second fall since most of us have been elected.

This government did meet last fall — that was our first session — but not this time. Local press in my community asked me: "Why didn't the government call the Legislature into session this fall?" I said to them: "I think it's pretty simple. They were afraid. They didn't want to show up. They didn't have the jam to do it. They didn't have the intestinal fortitude to do it." Hey, I'm just glad they finally found that intestinal fortitude and brought this House back, albeit for an all-too-short period of time.

There is a lot of work to be done for the people of British Columbia, and this is the House where we do that work. This is the House where both sides need to come together to spar, to cooperate. The give-and-take of democracy is what happens here. Now we're going to have, as I understand it, the shortest period of meeting in years — if not forever — in this House. I don't think that's anything this government should be proud of in the least.

I predict that it won't happen next year. I predict that the members opposite will be here next fall. Let's hope so.

I wanted to talk about an issue of importance in my community. One of the many reasons why we need to be here is to talk about issues of importance in our communities. This particular issue I want to talk about is agriculture and the future of agriculture in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows, where I represent the citizens.

Agriculture is an important industry. Unfortunately, it doesn't get the respect it deserves. It doesn't

get the support it deserves from this government. I think we've seen that all too often. I'm seeing it again this fall in my constituency with dire consequences for some of my constituents and, I would suggest, for us as a society, as a people, because agriculture is an important industry with \$85 million in gross receipts from Pitt Meadows. Maple Ridge also has a viable agriculture industry, but it's under attack.

People are also coming to understand that our food is not necessarily secure. The subject has been brought up in the past that we need to protect our agricultural lands and that we need to protect our food sources because we may not have the capability of easily getting it from elsewhere or at all. In the past I don't think that really had a lot of resonance, unfortunately, with a lot of people, but today it does.

[2040]

Today people are beginning to see the challenges of producing food. They're looking south across the border. They're seeing that the aquifers in the southwest and in the Midwest are starting to dry up. That's a serious consequence for an industry that depends a lot on irrigation. They're seeing the effects of global warming. They're seeing the cost of fuel skyrocketing and wondering if they will always be able to get those trucks rolling up to Save-On every day and what price we might have to pay for that, and what will happen if it comes to a choice between us and them for the food producers. Who are they going to choose if we're the "them"?

I think it's becoming really clear to British Columbians that we need to produce agriculture, we need to produce our own foods and we need to protect our agriculture. It's not just a nicety. Agriculture is not an anachronism or a pretty picture. It's not a romantic ideal. It's a significant industry in this province, and it needs to be treated as such.

There were some comments made earlier in this House about profit and some fingers pointing at our side, as I recall. We're not afraid of profit. I'm not afraid of profit. I'm not afraid of people making money. I don't care if people make a lot of money. I was in business. I know that if you want to be in business for very long, you've got to make money. You've got to make a profit. But what we on this side of the House don't want to see is all that profit going to the United States, to Germany, to Britain. We want to keep some of that profit right here in British Columbia.

I want to say something else about the function of agriculture too. It is primarily about food production.

Interjection.

M. Sather: Thank you, Member.

But it's not just about food production. It's also about community-building. It's a way of life. It's an important way of life. I know that the farmers and the producers in my community are the rocks. They're the solid people in my community that help to hold us together and develop our sense of who we are. We need that. We need these folks, and we have to support

them in order to continue to have them as those building blocks of our community.

Unfortunately, the Premier of this province and this government don't seem to see it that way, don't seem to see agriculture that way. They seem to see everything along the corporate model and that alone. The bottom line counts, but nothing else counts. I don't see that the Premier of this province.... I don't see that the ministers.... I do not see their interest in standing up for the little person in this province. I see them standing up for the corporations — doing a pretty good job of it — but not doing much for average folks in British Columbia. That hurts a lot of people, and it's hurting people in my community right now.

I want to talk about one particular project in my community, and it's part of the Golden Ears Bridge construction that's happening. It's going to take people from my community over to Langley and bring folks from the other side over to our communities and on to the Tri-Cities. There's going to be a connector from it running to the northwest quadrant of Maple Ridge, and it's called the Abernethy connector. This connector, or one like it, needs to be there to take people from that part of Maple Ridge to the bridge. But did it have to go where it is? Where it is right now, it's going through the prime farmland in our communities.

I'd like to ask: where was the voice of this government or the past government to stand up for agriculture in this debate? There was a debate a couple of years ago about where this connector would go. That debate wasn't put forward by Ken Stewart, the former MLA. It wasn't put forward by the Premier or the Minister of Agriculture. All silent. Nothing was heard from them.

[2045]

At that time I wasn't in government. I was the president of the Pitt Polder Preservation Society, which is an organization whose mandate is to protect agriculture and the environment in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. The governmental body, if you will, that's building the connectors, TransLink — one of the Minister of Transportation's favourite subjects.... When I talked to them or tried to talk to them about the location of this connector and pointed out the downside of this going through agricultural land, there wasn't much interest in talking about it.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

So we have it there now, and it's having a considerable impact. Some of that impact at this point, Mr. Speaker, not much can be done about. It's going through the Hampton farm, a hundred-year-old heritage farm where Bill Hampton and his sons still farm actively. He's a horse farmer. He's still out there farming his land by horse, doing a heck of a good job of it too.

It goes through the middle of Bill Laity's farm. And his son Matt and their family, who have also been out there farming for about the same length of time.... It's going to have a profound negative effect on those farms.

I wanted to talk about another farm that is going to be negatively affected by this connector. It's a blueberry farm primarily, and the property is called Formosa Nursery. The blueberry operation is a certified organic blueberry farm, the only one we have in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

An incredibly bad decision was made with regard to that farm. This farm has been there for 30 years. It's now operated by Mr. Ting Wu and his wife Risa Lin. Their mother and father founded the farm 30 years ago. They started from scratch. They built it from nothing. She used to work in neighbouring fields for the farmers for free. All she would get from it was the cuttings from their blueberries — thousands of them — which she and the kids planted, and slowly developed this farm.

Now, 30 years later, unfortunately, this family is looking at ruin, and nobody in this government is willing to stand up for them. Nobody in this government — certainly not the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, certainly not the Minister of Transportation — is willing to speak up and say that what happened there was wrong and to try to do something about it, because they're putting the connector right through the middle of his blueberry fields. Thirty-five metres — that's all it would take. That's all it would have taken, because I'm afraid it's not going to happen. I see no willingness whatsoever on the part of this government or the agencies underneath them to make it happen.

A 35-metre move could have saved his farm, could have saved his operation, could have saved a family farm. These folks work hard. They're the kind of people that we should be supporting in this province. They want to farm. It's so often the case when it comes to removals of land from the agricultural land reserve that it's people that want to get their land out of the agricultural land reserve. Ting and Risa are fighting tooth and nail to maintain their farm, to feed their two children, to continue to produce the high-quality organic blueberries that they've been producing, and they're not getting the support.

Why did that happen? That happened for the most bizarre of reasons, as far as I'm concerned — because a few people on the other side of their boundary in Maple Ridge complained that the road was going to be a little bit closer to their houses. They're not farmers. They're not involved in agriculture. They're not producing anything for sale. Instead of standing up for agriculture and the family farm, the decision was made by the Agricultural Land Commission, by TransLink, by local governments — nothing said from this government — to put that road in the middle of Ting and Risa's blueberry patch and destroy their operation.

[2050]

The bottom line is that they didn't count. Ting and Risa just didn't count. They're little people. They don't show up on the radar of this government. They don't belong to Genstar. They don't have a fish farm. They're not the people that this government tends to listen to, and it's a shame. It's a shame to see what happens by this uncaring government.

I hope that's going to change in the next session. I hope the government is learning something from this because incredibly, another road is planned to go through this farm, which will probably be the death knell if it's allowed to happen. This time it's not a contract that was signed with a P3 contractor two years ago. It's ongoing, now.

I'm asking, Mr. Speaker, that this Minister of Agriculture and Lands and this Minister of Transportation will pay heed this time, will prove me wrong, will show that the little people actually do count to this government. I don't believe it, but I'm willing to be proven wrong by these ministers, and I look forward to them standing up and protecting agriculture in my community. It hasn't been happening.

We have the member for Delta South who frequently reminds us that we have to eat to live. There couldn't be truer words spoken.

[Applause.]

Right on. But we also have to have agricultural land to produce the food on which we eat and live. Therein is the challenge for this government. I think agricultural land, from what I've seen, and the protection thereof, has had a very low priority for them.

Just in finishing up, I want to say a few words further about this family that's struggling hard to survive. Risa is a recent Taiwanese immigrant to Canada. Her husband has been here.... She came as an adult; he came as a child. She looks at me and says: "Michael, I don't understand how this could happen. This isn't China; this Canada." She cannot understand it. She cannot fathom it. She cannot grasp or comprehend how her and her family's livelihood would be torn away from them for no good reason.

It doesn't make sense to not only her; it doesn't make sense to a lot of people, to all the people who have come out and looked at it. They just shake their heads and say: "How could this mistake have been made?" But the Minister of Agriculture — what's he doing? He's hiding behind the skirts of the Agricultural Land Commission. That's what he's doing.

Hon. R. Neufeld: Skirts?

M. Sather: Yeah. I want the minister to stand up and be counted. I want him to stand up and say: "I am here to protect agriculture and the family farm."

Mr. Speaker, as far as the Minister of Transportation goes.... He also says that he's not going to interfere with TransLink. That's a new one. When we look back at what happened at the RAV line, the Canada line, where we had them vote over and over and over until he got the result he wanted.... But hey, as I say, he is only interested in the big stuff. He's not interested, unfortunately, in the little people, and that's who are really hurting. It's not just these folks. There are a lot of folks like them who are hurting in this province. Other members, colleagues of mine, have spoken about that eloquently earlier.

I have a lot more to say. I'd like to reserve my right to finish my speech before winding up proceedings. The one other thing I want to mention, Mr. Speaker....

Interjection.

M. Sather: Hey, I'm learning this business.

At this time, Mr. Speaker, I would like to....

[2055]

Interjection.

M. Sather: Yes, thank you, House Leader. I was going to say that, actually.

At this time I would like to move adjournment of the debate.

M. Sather moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. M. de Jong: I move that the House recess until 9:05 and thereafter continue to sit unless otherwise ordered.

On the motion to recess.

M. Farnworth: Well, once again we see that the government needs reminding that we have a calendar. We not only have a sessional calendar, but we have a daily calendar, which means that business begins in the morning on Mondays with private member's statements. It begins at ten and then proceeds to an afternoon session that begins at two. Then business continues on that basis. We adjourn at nine o'clock.

We could adjourn now and come back tomorrow and pick up the debate, which would be, you know, a civilized way of dealing with the issue and in accordance with the rules and the practices of this House. Or we can once again look at suspending the rules, not treating this place with the respect that it deserves and continuing on until who knows what.

I would put it to you that nine o'clock is a reasonable hour to adjourn. It will allow us to come back at ten o'clock tomorrow. People will have had a chance to think upon the remarks and the comments made in this chamber and to proceed forward on that basis.

Why the government doesn't want to do that and they feel the need to and want to just sort of sit until whatever hour.... Are they concerned about the possibility of question period? Are they concerned about having to come back another day? I don't know. What I do know is that there's a pattern here with this government that somehow the House is its personal plaything. "We will cancel a session when we want to cancel it. We will come in for a day, and we will get our business done in a day," and that's it, and wait a second, and they'll suspend the rules when it suits them.

We have a couple of minutes until nine o'clock. I would suggest that a better course of action, and why we will be voting against this motion, is that we ad-

journal at nine o'clock, and we come back tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. That is the way that we should be operating in this House, and that would be the message that I would give to the government. I would ask them to seriously consider that, because that is the appropriate way of doing things in this House.

A. Dix: I think the member from Port Coquitlam, the Opposition House Leader, has said it very well.

K. Krueger: Then sit down.

Mr. Speaker: Member, Member. The member for Vancouver-Kingsway has the floor.

A. Dix: As you know, one of the important elements of maintaining decorum and having, I think, reasonable and thoughtful debate in this House is the schedule that we put in the House every day. We have a schedule, and it actually has huge advantages for the government — more advantages for the government, I would argue, than for the opposition. One of the advantages that it has for the government is to know when things will happen and so on.

We are presently debating a motion to adjourn the Legislature of British Columbia. Presumably, the intent of the government is to adjourn for some time, if that motion were to pass. We think that there's more to do, and we believe profoundly that there's more to do. I think members of the Legislature, if you've heard them this evening, think there are significant things to be done. We believe that the reasonable thing would be for the House to return tomorrow at 10 a.m. to continue that significant debate and to invite all members of the House, all 79 members of the House, to participate in that debate, because it's an important debate about what we believe about parliamentary democracy and what we think about this session and where we think we should be going.

[2100]

Instead, what we have here is a motion that, I would suggest, seems to be a very mild motion — seems to be a mild motion. It suggests that we just adjourn for a few minutes and that we return and we continue on and debate, so that if all Members of the Legislative Assembly — all of us here, all 79 Members of the Legislative Assembly — want to participate in that debate, rather than do so based on our daily calendar, where we do it starting again at ten tomorrow morning, we continue on this evening — hour after hour, late into the evening. All of the implications that has for us and staff and everyone else.... I say that's not the right approach.

The other advantage, though, of the Government House Leader's motion is that it denies us the opportunity to ask questions of the government in question period tomorrow, because what it says is that we will continue debating this motion, rather than doing it in the regular course of events and having a question period tomorrow. Listen, hon. Speaker. I must say that I have questions for the government. I have questions

for the Minister of Health, and I think that other members here have questions. We have questions about Community Living B.C. We have questions about environmental protection. We have questions for the Attorney General. We have questions about agriculture. We have questions about forestry that we have not had the opportunity to ask.

The principle of the debate and the motion that the hon. Government House Leader has introduced here is to suggest that maybe we'll allow people an opportunity to speak on an adjournment motion, but we won't allow them to speak in question period. We disagree on this side of the House with that suggestion, because I'm telling you, hon. Speaker, that we're here. We're ready. We're ready to go. We're ready to have a debate. We're ready to have a question period tomorrow.

In fact, I can't wait. I can already think of questions. I know, for example, that the member for Cariboo South has more questions to ask about schools in his constituency, and he'd love to ask those questions tomorrow. I think the member for Cariboo South should be allowed to ask those questions in question period tomorrow.

The member for Cariboo North, our opposition Forest critic, has significant questions to ask of the Minister of Forests, who has been negligent in managing his portfolio. He has been negligent. We have not got the information that we need, that the people of British Columbia need, with respect to forestry. He has questions for the Minister of Forests, and he should be allowed to ask them.

My colleague from Nelson-Creston has questions for the Minister of Agriculture that he would like to ask, and I think those are questions and answers we would all like to hear. If this motion passes, we will not get to hear the questions that the member for Nelson-Creston has to ask, and we should hear those questions.

Hon. Speaker, we are living, I think, in a very significant period for everybody involved in the community living sector. I know that the minister responsible for ActNow would agree with this. There is a crisis at Community Living B.C. They've spent all the money. There are significant questions that we have for the Minister of Children and Family Development. The member from Esquimalt would like to ask those questions tomorrow, and we think she should be heard tomorrow in this House.

The member from Cowichan has raised significant issues in his community with respect to issues of homelessness. He has raised them in a courageous way, and he would like to ask questions about those tomorrow. He has more questions than that, though. He has many more questions than that. He has questions with respect to skills training and the government's reckless decisions to abandon our apprenticeship system, and he'd like to ask those questions tomorrow.

The member for North Coast....

Interjection.

A. Dix: The member for Port Moody-Westwood has a question he'd like to ask on home inspectors. Be-

lieve it or not, if the Solicitor General introduced a bill tomorrow on home inspectors.... If he listened to home inspectors rather than threatening them, if he listened to home inspectors instead of saying, "Don't write the Premier of British Columbia. Oh, gosh, don't write the Premier of British Columbia..."

[2105]

I think the member for Port Moody–Westwood is making a good point. If we gave a couple more days to this legislative session and we had questions in question period about home inspectors, maybe the Solicitor General would see the light and stop threatening people and answer questions with respect to home inspectors.

My colleague from Yale-Lillooet — you know he has questions he'd like to ask. My colleague from Yale-Lillooet has a very significant question to ask about the way this government responds to freedom of information, which is a fundamental law in our province, one that we proudly introduced in the 1990s and which this government is frittering away with its policies. It is impossible to get this government to respond within the time limits to freedom-of-information requests, and my colleague from Yale-Lillooet would like to ask about that tomorrow.

Hon. Speaker, my colleague from Surrey–Panorama Ridge would like to ask some questions about why it has taken so long to respond to the health care demands of the people of Surrey. He'd also like to ask why the Premier of British Columbia, in what has turned out to be a cold and snowy winter, announced a policy decision with respect to income assistance at the UBCM that he has failed to implement this winter. He'd like to ask that question, and we'd like to hear the answer to that question.

We on this side of the House are against this motion, this motion of legislation by exhaustion, this motion that says that if you want to give a speech against the adjournment of the House, you have to do it at three or four in the morning. We are against it. The Government House Leader, significantly, in response to requests for emergency debate, has said in those discussions this week: "Oh, no. You can't debate anything that I don't say you can debate." He said: "We brought the House back for only one reason."

Well, I got a letter from you, hon. Speaker, that said the House was coming back, and I'd like to read that letter. You said, hon. Speaker: "After consultation with the government of the province of British Columbia, I am satisfied that the public interest requires that the House shall meet."

We believe that the public interest includes people who are receiving services from Community Living B.C. We believe it includes people who believe in the agricultural land reserve. We believe it includes people who want a response to our homelessness issues. We believe that it includes people who are concerned about cuts in health care. We believe that it includes all those things. The Government House Leader can call the House back, but he doesn't get to decide what we debate. He doesn't get to.

We have, for example, provisions, such as the provisions in Standing Order 35, and if we can make the case for those motions — and you get to rule, hon. Speaker, on all our behalf on all those kinds of motions — then we have the right to do that. That's not the right of the Government House Leader. The Government House Leader can choose what he thinks, and he can use the majority in the House, but the majority in the House is not the Legislature. The Legislature speaks with its own voice.

If it is the case that the majority of the House thinks that because they have some ideas about what the agenda should be, it should only be these things and some other things, then they fundamentally believe that perhaps we should dispense with parliament. But we don't believe that. We believe that the accountability that will come tomorrow in question period and that will come the day after in question period and the day after that in question period is fundamental to what this House is all about.

That's why I will not only be rising, hopefully, after I've convinced the Government House Leader to withdraw this motion and bring us back at 10 a.m. tomorrow, but I'll be rising in opposition to the decision to adjourn the House, as well, later on.

[2110]

This motion also speaks to our fundamental privileges as MLAs: question period, questions on the notice paper. By the way, we've put many questions on the notice paper.

The member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast has put written questions on the notice paper that should have been answered by this government and that they have not answered. When did the member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast put them on the notice paper? A long time ago. Many months ago.

Any reasonable government could have responded to those questions. They look at those questions on the notice paper, and they say: "Well, there's nothing obliging us to answer, so we won't. That provision of the standing orders doesn't count. The only provisions of the standing orders that count are the ones that are moved by the Government House Leader." We don't agree with that; we oppose that view.

We're opposing this motion to extend hours. We'd like to come back and to continue to debate the Government House Leader's adjournment motion tomorrow at 10 a.m. and continue to debate it until members of this House have had an opportunity to be heard fully and reasonably in that debate. We would like to have another chance, which seems reasonable in our parliamentary democracy, to ask questions of the executive tomorrow, because our parliamentary system is not the executive. It's parliament. The executive should be submitted to questions in question period. That's the way we function in our parliamentary democracy.

I ask all members of the House to oppose this motion, to have a regular adjournment of the House and to come back at 10 a.m. tomorrow. I'm asking all members of the House to do that today: to have this ad-

journalism debate take place that is so important to our constituents. It's so important to them.

The hon. member for Burnaby-Edmonds has spent, I think, an extraordinary couple of months meeting with advocates for mental health. The issues we debate in this House are important to his constituents and to those people who are expecting answers from us on those questions — not answers that will all be provided on the opposition side, but answers that can be provided on the government side as well. Those are fundamental questions, and they want to be heard in the debate.

I'm asking all members of the House to oppose this motion and to allow us to go home and come back and have a reasonable debate about that tomorrow, to have that debate at a time when people might reasonably be allowed to watch the proceedings, to have that at a time when we can have a reasonable and thoughtful debate. I ask all members of the House to oppose this motion, and I look forward to support on both sides of the House for this opposition to this motion tonight.

D. Routley: I rise, also, in opposition to this motion, which adds to the cynicism that British Columbians must feel about this House during these days, as they see their 42 percent of this House struggle for means to bring the issues that they struggle with on a day-to-day basis to the table of this Legislature, to bring this government to account for its role in dismantling the public services of this province, in selling off in bailiff-like fashion the assets of this province, and then having the contemptuous gall not to allow this House to sit as it was scheduled.

The member for Vancouver-Kingsway has brought a very good point to the table. British Columbians will not stay up until 2 a.m. or until 4 a.m. to hear the words of this House and this side of the House. That is unfortunate, because they will be denied the opportunity to hear this as it takes place at a reasonable hour when we can do justice to the issues that they expect to have discussed in this House.

It is the height of arrogance for this government to put forward its set calendar and then to abuse it in this fashion. It's the height of abuse of the democratic process for this government to deny the opposition the opportunity to bring them to account. There are so many issues, both provincially and locally, that deserve the attention of this government, so many issues that this government has helped to despoil and to make worse, so many circumstances of British Columbians who struggle that have not been addressed by this government, so many obstacles placed in front of the success of vulnerable British Columbians that this government placed and refuses to remove.

[2115]

I've made a list of issues in my own riding that need to be brought to the table of the Legislature. Unfortunately, giving each of these issues one or two minutes at this time will take up more than the 30 minutes I have allotted to me. That, again, is unfortunate. It's sad.

It's sad that an inquest into the death of a logger, which implicated this government and its changes to the Forest Act, cannot be discussed in this House adequately. It's sad. It's sad that the loggers of my community — even the one who was underneath a tree at the bottom of a hill and dead — cannot have the voice of this Legislature to bring justice to their circumstance.

This government dismantled an entire culture, an entire industry. It purposely severed the chain of responsibility. It purposely allowed companies to avoid their onus to protect workers. It purposely created a situation that has resulted in the deaths of scores of British Columbians, and it needs to be brought to account.

That inquest in my hometown of Duncan, B.C., pointed a very heavy finger at this government for its responsibility in severing that chain. The outcomes to the widow, Debbie Geddes — who sat through all those days of testimony, as I did — hardly seem busywork to this member and hardly seem busywork to this side of the House. These are life-and-death issues.

In my town we have witnessed the sad deaths of three homeless people over the last two years. One was burned in a fire. One died of exposure. One died crushed in a garbage container. These are the issues that this government doesn't want to face. Those are the faces and the names that they don't want repeated and shown in this House. Why? Because ultimately, they are responsible for the health, welfare, safety and prosperity of British Columbians, and they have failed.

I grew up in that community. I grew up in that industry of forestry. I, like many other members here, grew up with wood in our hands, either as loggers, as sawmill workers, as builders. We've been betrayed by this government.

Throughout the history of this province, British Columbians have recognized the advantages we have. We've recognized the opportunity that our water, our trees, our fish bring to us as British Columbians. Successive governments, both Socred and NDP, have resisted the temptation to liquidate that advantage.

It's often said that we inherit from our forefathers this world and the circumstances and benefits and wealth we have. I think it's far more appropriate that we view it in another light. I think it's far more appropriate that we see that we are, in fact, borrowing this world and all of those resources from our children. We are, in fact, borrowing that competitive advantage that our hydro resource offers us. We are borrowing the resource of our trees and our fish from our children.

At the rate of destruction, the rate of dismantling and the rate of desolation that this government has been bringing to this province, our children are being disenfranchised by increment. My young daughter, who voted for the first time in the last federal election, who will vote in the next provincial election.... I'm hoping I know who she'll vote for.

[2120]

Her vote used to control and benefit and direct the assets of this province, like B.C. Rail, like B.C. Hydro. This government has set about to change all that. This

government has set about to reward its friends at the expense of our forests, to reward its friends at the expense of the competitive advantage that our public health care offers us.

Our public health care system, viewed in full value, is the greatest competitive advantage that we hold. In the United States, 16 percent of GDP is spent on medical services; in Canada, less than 10 percent. That's an advantage. In Canada a car costs \$1,800 cheaper to build than it does in the United States because of public health care. That's a competitive advantage. Those competitive advantages — public services, health and education — are being traded off by this government for the profit of their friends and insiders, and British Columbians reject it.

British Columbians need those questions and those issues to be brought to this House, but this government doesn't want that to happen. This government wants this building, this beautiful House belonging to every British Columbian, to be nothing more than their tool, their plaything, their cover. We are expected to waltz in here, do the government's business in one day and waltz out, and to forget about the inquest in Duncan that implicated this government and to forget about the thousands upon thousands of British Columbians who are huddled in the cold out there tonight. We are meant to forget all that.

We are meant to forget that our water is being traded off. We are meant to forget that this government created a market of speculation on our rivers so that over 600 permits have been flooded into a market of speculation that was created by this government by their commitment to buy power at exorbitant rates — again, to trade off the advantages of this province to their friends. They have the arrogance not to allow those issues to be brought to this House in a timely manner.

Agriculture. What makes us what we are? What will maintain and make sustainable those qualities that make us what we are as British Columbians? Our agricultural land reserve is a jewel, but it won't survive as a museum piece or a pastoral landscape. It needs the support of this government to take measures to support agriculture, small-scale farming, small-scale meat production and all of the other value-added elements that our farmers bring to the land base. They need our support, and this government is not listening.

This government has failed to act to reverse the trend that we see in poverty in this province. The levels of poverty in this province amongst children: 23.5 percent of our children live below the poverty line. That is a disgrace. That is B.C. leading in the worst way, and this government doesn't think that's important enough to bring the House back, sit on a schedule, deal with business in the appropriate manner.

No. This government is too arrogant for that. This government won't be told what to do. This government won't listen to anyone. This government won't listen to the members on this side, and they think that's okay. They think it's all right to smirk. They think it's all right to dismiss. So be it.

Maybe we should welcome that. Maybe we should welcome the opportunity to paint this government in the arrogant fashion that it deserves. But that's not good enough for the people of British Columbia, because their matters are more urgent than that.

Their matters require a government that's prepared to sit to a schedule and be made accountable. Their issues are immediate. Their issues, for so many of them, are the difference between life and death tonight, finding a dry and warm place tonight. This government waves this flag of surplus while it slashes services, while it leaves the vulnerable freezing in the cold, while it lets our education system slip, while it allows our advantages to be traded off to the highest bidder.

[2125]

Mr. Speaker, it's sad, and this is a sad government. It's sad because it refuses to listen. It's sad because it's forgotten who it governs for. It's sad because a beautiful province and a noble people have been disgraced by this arrogance. It's sad because the process that brought us here is being treated with such contempt.

I came here never having planned this as a piece of my life, but to do the best I can for my community. I assumed that's why we all came here. I assumed that we came here to do the best. You know, the old 100 percent; hell, no, 110 percent. "We're going to do it all for the people." I know I'm naive, but I didn't know I was that naive. I really thought we had come here to do our best, each one of us, collectively for this province. But it appears that this side of the House is the only side interested in pursuing that to its full extent.

This government refuses to allow the issues of British Columbia to come to the table. We have an Education Minister who constantly trumpets the same funding package over and over again. I ask the Minister of Education to come and manage my daughter's allowance for me. If she did, she could come and tell my daughter, who receives \$15 a week, that now she receives \$20 a week. It's the most she's ever received. It's the most allowance she's ever received.

I would be happy, because then the minister could also explain to my daughter that she could pay my increased MSP premiums, she could pay her teacher-mother's salary increase, she could pay the heating increases that my house has experienced with the cold and the increasing bills. I could download all sorts of costs to my daughter.

Point of Order

Hon. M. de Jong: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Take your seat, please, Member.

Hon. M. de Jong: God knows, discussions about allowances are always fascinating in this chamber, but I have actually reviewed much of the history of debates such as this. Contrary to what members might like to believe or want people to believe, it's not the first time something like this has arisen in this chamber.

I have noted the following. In the discussion around the adjournment motion that we were previously dealing with, there is great latitude to discuss some of the matters that members have brought to the floor of the Legislature. I've also noted, from a review of the history of those debates, that insofar as this particular motion is concerned, it is a very narrow discussion. It is a discussion about the recess to a particular hour. The Chair has in the past provided direction to the House to focus on that particular point, and I commend that history to you.

A. Dix: On the point of order, I think, very specifically, the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith has been doing this. The key question here for the House is whether the House should extend hours this evening and continue the debate. That has implications for a calendar and our ability to raise issues in this Legislature or not. Those are the issues, I would say in my submission, which the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith is addressing.

I'm sure the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith, who is in the midst of describing and raising it, will bring the issue back to the specific motion. The specific motion, as you know, hon. Speaker, is to extend hours this evening, which has the implication, as the Government House Leader well knows, of denying us an opportunity to ask questions of the Government House Leader and others in question period tomorrow.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: The member for Cowichan-Ladysmith continues, and I remind him of the relevance of what is being debated.

Debate Continued

D. Routley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I realize the debate is around adjournment to a certain hour, which will be well past my daughter's bedtime. As a result, I think this House ought to adjourn to ten o'clock and continue its business in a normal fashion. But I'll continue.

My daughter could then turn around and pay all of those downloaded costs....

[2130]

Mr. Speaker: Member, we are talking about the adjournment motion to 9:05, so let's keep it to the point.

D. Routley: I shall do that, Mr. Speaker.

I could ask the Education Minister then to explain to her that she has more money than she has ever had and should have no problem. It's important for the children of British Columbia to know that this House represents them adequately and properly — and at a reasonable hour as well.

It's unfortunate that the government has forced the people of British Columbia to see their issues diminished to the extent that we must find any opportunity to weave those issues into this narrow debate around

adjournment. If we had had adequate time, if we had had a session, if that session had followed its calendar, all of these issues could have been brought forward in a regular and ordinary fashion in their own time. But they don't have their own time, and we don't have time because of this government's choice to not hold a full session and to attempt to drag this Legislature to do its business and its business only, without consideration of all of these many issues that confront us in our communities and across this province every day.

I believe it's important for us on this side of the House to stretch that envelope of procedure as we are doing in order to bring these issues that are life and death and that do matter to the hearts and souls of British Columbians to a government that isn't listening, that won't listen, that has never listened, that needs to be brought to account, that needs to hear its people and needs to remember whom it governs for, because those thousands of people huddled in the cold are citizens too.

Mr. Speaker: Member, I'm going to remind you again: stick to the point. You know the motion is the adjournment to 9:05. If we want to go into the next part of that motion, we can move there, but the motion is the adjournment to 9:05.

D. Routley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I oppose the adjournment to 9:05. I recommend that the government members speak to their side, persuade their leaders to see that the regular course of business ought to be followed and that British Columbians expect no less of us as a whole.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Surrey-Whalley — reminding him what the motion is.

B. Ralston: This particular provision of the rules, or the adjournment to past the hour that we're scheduled to sit at, is born of a fixed sitting time on a daily basis. That schedule, which was adopted by the incoming government in 2001, was born of the experience that many members opposite had during their years in opposition. Perhaps a decision was made to approach government business in what they regarded as a more prudent manner.

One of the ways of doing that is to debate during the course of the day on a fixed schedule. One of the ways of ensuring that is to set those fixed hours and to adhere to them. It provides certainty as to what the order of business might very well be, and it provides some order and rationality to the decision-making process.

Democracy, in some respects, can be a fragile flower if it's not carefully nourished. To drive the House late into the night and early into the morning as members opposite were wont to do when they were in opposition.... They've obviously had that experience and thought better of it and sought to provide the House with a better way of doing its business. One of those ways was to adjourn at a regular hour so the decision-making process could be approached in a more orderly way.

[2135]

I speak against the motion here for that very reason — that the House is engaged in a full day of business. If we come back tomorrow, at the usual hour, the House business will unfold according to the schedule that the government, after all, chose to set in motion. There will be a question period. If we don't adopt that procedure, if this motion passes, that opportunity for coming back here tomorrow in a relaxed and civil fashion with the opportunity to pose questions to the government will be lost to the opposition and, indeed, to the public of British Columbia.

As the last few days have proven, there are serious questions that have arisen out of public debate, not only in this chamber but across the province and, indeed, some issues that touch on national matters. So the importance of having a question period tomorrow is, I would submit, a strong reason to oppose the passing of this motion at this time.

The kinds of questions that can be asked obviously depend to some extent on the inclination of individual members and the issues that have arisen in debate and what the public wants to ask. In my particular riding people want me to.... They're not cynical about the House and the Legislature. They expect me, they ask me, to come to Victoria and raise issues on their behalf.

One of the mechanisms, the most well-known mechanism, which people see and watch on television and is excerpted sometimes in the news clips, is the question period. People also see it in the federal House. That question period forms an essential part of people's image of the Legislature. Their very image of democracy is the holding of those in power to account through a personal exchange under parliamentary rules on the floor of this chamber.

If this motion is passed as the Government House Leader has put it, then that opportunity for tomorrow — and indeed for a lengthy period of time — will not be available to members of the opposition, and that access will not be available to members of the public. For that reason, it's very important, I would argue, that this motion not pass at this time and that we come back tomorrow at ten o'clock.

There are bills on the order paper. I know that the Attorney General appeared to appreciate some of the comments that were made today, perhaps missing the point of what had taken place in the spring, but that's beside the point, I suppose. They're on the order paper, and it's open to the Attorney General to bring those bills forward tomorrow. They're on the order paper.

If we come back at ten o'clock, there'll be ample time to deal with the inquiries act. The Attorney General can elucidate the House as to what he had in mind with that particular bill and why it's important for the public of British Columbia and for the good order and running of the Legislature, and indeed the running of public policy, to have an inquiry act that's framed in the way it was framed.

The government has had some time to reflect upon some of the critical comments that were made in the spring. There's an army of talented lawyers to assist the Attorney General in forming those opinions. We have

time available tomorrow, if we come back at ten o'clock, to begin that discussion. Again, it's another reason why I would say that the adjournment that's proposed and the terms that are proposed by the Government House Leader should be opposed at this time.

I would look forward to other questions being posed to various ministers. When one hears, certainly.... This is notwithstanding the pending ruling by the Speaker, but I would submit that the issue of the clinic that's proposed to be opened in Vancouver is of urgent and pressing public importance. Further questions ought to be asked of the Minister of Health on that very topic.

[2140]

When you have a doctor who speaks publicly in a newspaper article, proposing that patients return to the process of barter in order to pay for medical services, things are in a very serious and parlous state in British Columbia. It's very, very serious indeed. People seem to have forgotten the lessons of the last 45 years of medicare. To seriously propose that as a public policy position for people in British Columbia, to say: let's return.... I'm paraphrasing, but this is what the doctor said: that we ought to return to....

Mr. Speaker: Again, I want to remind the member: I'm giving you broad parameters here. You started off very well, but you're reaching farther. Remember, it's the adjournment motion to 9:05.

B. Ralston: Yes, and perhaps I can return to my theme, then: the defeat of this adjournment motion will provide the opportunity, if we return to the regular order of House business tomorrow, for a question period. I am endeavouring to give what I hope are good and convincing reasons as to why we ought to have that opportunity to raise those kinds of questions.

One of the ways in which I'm hoping to persuade the House to adopt the position that I'm advocating is to demonstrate the importance of the public policy issues that can be raised in a question period tomorrow. These are not matters that should be lightly taken. I'm sure no member of the House would say that, Mr. Speaker. There are, I would say, significant issues that ought to be the subject of the kind of question period that is the very image of the Legislature and the very image of parliamentary democracy — that is, the give-and-take of a question period before this House.

That's the basis for those fixed hours. Indeed, the government at the outset of the new Legislature after the election in 2005, in a widely heralded and applauded move, extended the question period from 15 minutes to 30 minutes — thinking, no doubt, that this would improve the opportunity of the Legislature to probe areas of public policy. Given that extra 15 minutes — a doubling of the time, obviously — it would speak to the importance that the government placed upon the question period.

To propose this adjournment application that would deny the opposition the right to a question period tomorrow would seem to fly and contradict every-

thing that the government put forward when they talked about the new tone in the Legislature and proposed a change in the rules, lengthening the question period by a full 15 minutes.

I'm hoping, Mr. Speaker, that I'm convincing the other side that it's important to withdraw this motion, perhaps upon reconsideration of the situation that the House finds itself in at this hour and with a view to looking at the speakers list as to just why we ought not to adopt this motion and continue debate until who knows when — later in the night, early in the morning, to the dawn of the next day or whenever parliamentary rules permit us to go to. It's not, I would submit, a healthy and productive way to make decisions or debate issues.

To some extent it gives the public a more diminished view of the political process, not a favourable view. Our personal esteem may fluctuate, obviously, but the esteem in which the institution is held is of utmost importance in a democracy, and that kind of esteem is important if we are to be, I would submit, truly effective in doing our job. For the moment, having been elected — and obviously it is not a permanent position — we are guardians of that spirit of democracy as it's expressed in the parliamentary forum. We have an obligation, indeed a loyalty, to Her Majesty the Queen to see that the process is conducted in accordance with parliamentary tradition.

[2145]

Not to follow the fixed calendar — as the members opposite know, and the Government House Leader will remember from experience when he was in opposition — can be a very debilitating process. Ultimately, there's unnecessary acrimony, bad decisions and just a general disrespect that it leads the House into. All members are taken with that plunge in respect down a notch, and it's simply not healthy for the institution.

So I would urge the House not to adopt this resolution. It simply seems to me that there is a better way of proceeding with the matter that's before this House. I think I am about to conclude my remarks, and I look forward to my colleagues joining me in expressing their views as to why this particular motion ought not to succeed, narrowly framed as it is.

I hope I have given ample reasons why this motion ought to be defeated and why I personally intend to vote against it on behalf of my constituents. I look forward to hearing my colleagues express their views before the House as to why they, too, might feel that this motion ought to be defeated. So at this point, I'll conclude my remarks.

Mr. Speaker: I want to remind the members that I gave the last member a lot of latitude. With a lot of repetition in what was being said, I think that we should get to the point and speak to the point of the adjournment motion to 9:05, and strictly to the point.

G. Coons: I rise again to discuss this adjournment motion. Again, I see that it totally flies in the face of an open, accountable and democratic government. It denies

the opposition to represent their constituents; it denies the opposition to represent British Columbians by not allowing them to participate in a democratic question period; it denies us and the government from participating in members' statements; it denies putting motions and bills on the order paper for the next three days.

This motion — and I am opposed to it — flies, as I said, in the face of the democratic process. There are many issues out there that I came into this Legislature to bring forth. Not being allowed, because of this motion, to have the opportunity to bring forth issues from Haida Gwaii or Bella Coola puts me in a position of feeling that I am not representing my constituents. It's because of this government — this government that is taking the democratic process, throwing it in the face of British Columbians and not allowing us to have the debate.

During question period there are many things that we need to discuss. This motion does not allow that. We look at the forest industry, the coastal forest industry on Haida Gwaii, and why this government is not representing communities. We need to ask that in question period, and this motion denies that.

When we look at what's happening with the Great Bear rain forest.... My constituents sent me down here to speak in favour of sitting — Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday, during the scheduled time that we're supposed to be here, during question period, during a two-minute statement — to talk about why this government is not committing to the no-net-job-loss for the Great Bear rain forest and the memorandum of agreement signed by the North Coast LRMP and the government.

This motion denies that opportunity for me to represent my constituents. It denies me bringing out the concerns of all the proponents of the Great Bear rain forest and the proponents of EBM. When we've got the Premier going to his photo ops with his worldwide press releases extolling the benefits of the Great Bear rain forest, that is one reason that we need to extend this debate.

[2150]

We need to have question period, we need to have written statements, and we need to have two-minute members' statements on what is happening in this province. When this government came into power, they broke many promises. Again, this motion highlights the legacy of broken promises and highlights the undemocratic, uncaring....

Mr. Speaker: Member, please take your seat.

Hon. M. de Jong: With the greatest respect to the hon. member, the motion — as the Chair has pointed out on several occasions — does none of those things. It is a motion to recess the House to 9:05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Member continues.

G. Coons: I believe, Mr. Speaker, that when speaking to this motion, the whole purpose of the motion

that we have here is to deny the democratic process, to deny question period for the next three days when it was scheduled, to deny members' statements, to deny motions and bills on the order paper.

As I said, as I come into this House with issues, as both sides come into the House with issues that need to be discussed in the next three days, this motion denies that. I would like, with the indulgence of the Speaker, to continue and look at some of the issues that I would like to present, because this motion will potentially deny that.

Mr. Speaker: No, Member, you don't have the latitude to do that. You speak to the motion. Don't speak about the issues. Speak to the motion of adjournment.

G. Coons: I believe I was, in my mind, speaking to the motion to recess. In conclusion, I will say that I am opposed to this, because the democratic process is being denied to British Columbians and my constituents by this government.

B. Simpson: I, too, rise to oppose the motion of adjournment to 9:05 p.m. As I understand it, that motion does preclude us from continuing the schedule of this House. Therefore, it is a substantive part of our debate tonight to say: what does that mean? What does it mean if we simply continue on the debate through the evening and into the wee hours of the morning, versus voting against this motion and voting for the motion to adjourn until the normal hours of business, which would begin at 10 a.m. tomorrow morning?

If we do not vote down the 9:05 adjournment motion, as the member previous to me pointed out, then we lose the ability to continue on with the normal business of this House at 10 a.m., to continue the debate that we started this evening on why we should not adjourn this House, and to have the normal order of business that we should have a right to have if we continue on the normal schedule.

As an opposition member I do not have very many avenues at my disposal to bring forward the voices of British Columbians — not only in my riding, but in other ridings — to this Legislature without the ability for us to use question period — particularly in the fall session, because the fall session should be the legislative session. It should be the session in which we get to debate what the government's agenda is in the form of legislation.

In the spring session much of the time is taken up by the government's throne speech, by the government's budget speech and by estimates debate. There is ample opportunity for members of the opposition to rise in many different venues to ask the questions that we need to ask and to make the statements that we need to make on behalf of British Columbians.

But in the fall session we are not afforded those opportunities. Therefore in the fall session, question period becomes a critical component of the tools of the opposition to bring forward into this Legislature the voices of British Columbians that are not being heard by the government.

That's what parliamentary democracy is about. Parliamentary democracy recognizes the right of British Columbians, through the official opposition party, to have their voices heard. The failure of this government to allow that to occur is the failure to support parliamentary democracy. It is an undermining of the parliamentary democracy in this province.

Adjourning to 9:05. As much as the House Leader for the government wants to make out that this does not allow us to address the substantive issues, it does in fact, because it precludes us from bringing forward the questions that we need to ask on behalf of British Columbians — not only questions for our constituents but questions in the area that we have been given assignment to match the minister in a role that we call the critic's role.

I have many questions that I need to ask as the critic for the Minister of Forests and Range. This government, by its choice not to hold this fall session, has denied me that right. The motion to adjourn until 9:05 once again denies me that right.

I have questions from my riding. As Forests critic, I have questions that go across the province. I have questions on behalf of members in this House who will look to me to bring forward their questions and matters that I have expertise in. I have other members in this House who have much more expertise than I do in other areas that I have asked them to raise questions in, and this adjournment motion will deny us that right.

It is the fundamental obligation of the government to hear all the voices of British Columbians, even the voices that they don't want to hear. As we've seen in question period in this short period of time, we have brought to light a concern on behalf of citizens of this province about a minister's actions towards them for raising concerns directly to the Premier, not through the opposition.

I ask you, Mr. Speaker: what course of action do they have? If they cannot do that through us, if they cannot do that through the opposition in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, what recourse do they have but to write a letter to the Premier and then be reprimanded by the minister for doing so?

This government cannot reprimand us. It's our job. That's what the people of British Columbia elected us to do. That's what they sent us here to do. I believe that is what we have the right to do, and therefore we should be opposed to adjourning to 9:05. We should be for adjourning until the normal order of business tomorrow at 10 a.m., in which we will have the potential opportunity of having a question period to continue to raise British Columbians' concerns in this Legislature. Outside of the fall session, we do have other opportunities.

What strikes me as odd in all of this is that the government was elected on a platform of accountability and transparency. The government was elected on a platform of fixing the political interference in the legislative process. That's what they went to the people with. If you go back and look in the records, that's

what's in their platform in the election of 2001. It's very clear.

They acted on that. You have to give the government credit for at least acting on that — in spirit, if not in intent and if not in action — by introducing a fixed calendar, by introducing a means by which British Columbians could be guaranteed that this Legislature would convene and that the opposition would be able to play a role in this Legislature on behalf of British Columbians. They've failed to do that.

They've failed to do that in this fall session, and they've once again failed to do that in tabling a motion to reconvene the debate at 9:05 rather than bringing us back into the Legislature at 10 a.m. tomorrow morning.

[2200]

Now, as far as what I would like to ask in the Legislature tomorrow morning if we do not pass this adjournment motion.... If in fact we go back to the motion to adjourn until the normal business hour of 10 a.m. tomorrow morning and we get a question period, I have all kinds of questions. I have questions as to why, for example, there are....

Mr. Speaker: Member, reminding you where we're going.

B. Simpson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have, as far as I'm concerned, the right as a member of the opposition to have the ability to ask questions that hold a government to account.

Interjection.

B. Simpson: Thank you to the member who reminded me that it is my obligation to do that. But it's an obligation I cannot fulfil. It's an obligation I don't hold the ability to fulfil. That obligation and my ability to fulfil it rest in the hands of the government.

When the government chooses not to abide by the structures that they have established for accountability and transparency by not bringing this House back on the regular schedule that they had committed to and then, when they do choose to convene the House, decide that they're going to play with the rules to suit their purposes, I again remind the minister that that is not what they were elected on. We have to call into question the veracity of the words that they used to convince the people of British Columbia to make them government and not the opposition members of this House.

Adjourning to 9:05 forces us to continue on the debate that we have just now, forces us to continue down the path that we're on, where we will talk through the night. We will have members raise their legitimate concerns that they cannot raise.

C. Evans: Maybe even sing.

B. Simpson: We will maybe even have one of our members sing and put the lights out again. That is quite a possibility.

If we pass this motion, continuing on in that vein, we will have the opportunity to raise substantive issues. We will have the opportunity, as one of our members pointed out already, to hear from all of the individual members on the substantive issues that we have. But that is not what we want, and that is not what we need.

The regular sitting of the House should continue until November 30. The regular sitting of the House should continue until we are done with the business, until we have completed all of the tasks that should be in front of us — including the bills addressed before this House; including some of the motions that could be brought forward; including hearing, from members, the members' statements that they wish to put forward and the questions that they wish to put forward.

In my estimation, that failure to withdraw the adjournment motion until 9:05 and not to go back to the motion to adjourn until 10 a.m. is the failure on the part of the government to fulfil its promise of transparency and accountability to the people of British Columbia, the promise on which they were elected as government and which they will fail to fulfil by not allowing the opposition to continue to fulfil its obligation in a parliamentary democratic process.

Standing Order 35 (Speaker's Ruling)

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we continue, I do want to read the decision that was made earlier. Earlier this day the hon. Leader of the Official Opposition sought to move adjournment of the House to discuss a matter of urgent public importance under Standing Order 35 — namely, the need to send a clear unanimous message from this House to the government of Canada that British Columbia supports the United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples.

In her submission, the Leader of the Official Opposition argued that the matter was necessary for urgent attention by this House since the United Nations is scheduled to vote on the declaration tomorrow in New York. I note that the hon. member has provided me with the written documentation required by Standing Order 35, and I thank her for the courtesy of having given the Chair advance notice.

In his submission on this matter, the Government House Leader acknowledged that the United Nations declaration was a matter of importance and interest. However, he also correctly noted that the decision regarding this application must be based on not the urgency of the issue but rather the urgency of debate in this chamber.

[2205]

The Chair has considered the application carefully in light of the arguments put forward by both sides. While there is no doubt about the seriousness of concern of upcoming events at the United Nations, it is clearly not a matter involving administrative responsibilities of any ministry of the province of British Co-

lumbia but rather falls within the jurisdiction of the government of Canada.

Jurisdictional issues involving Standing Order 35 are canvassed eloquently in Speaker Barnes's decision on May 24, 1994. In that decision the Chair upheld the well-established practice of the House to proceed to emergency debate only for matters under provincial jurisdiction. For these reasons, the Leader of the Official Opposition's application does not qualify under Standing Order 35.

Before we continue, I want to remind members that the point has been well canvassed about the fact that if we adjourn to 9:05, the implications of the continuous day....

Debate Continued

R. Chouhan: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand why this government is so afraid to face people and British Columbians' concerns in question period tomorrow and the day after tomorrow and the day after that. At the most, we are left with three more days. In those three days we would have the opportunity to ask questions that we are asked, and we represent people in our constituencies.

I am against this motion of adjournment. It's important that we meet tomorrow under the normal hours so that we can continue and carry out the business of our constituents who have sent us here to represent them. In tomorrow's question period and the day after that, I would like to ask questions about homelessness in Burnaby-Edmonds. I want to ask questions about mental health. I want to ask questions to this government about the dismantling of the Human Rights Commission.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

In the last session I moved a private member's bill about the Human Rights Commission. I can only do that if we meet tomorrow or the day after tomorrow or on Thursday. This government is so afraid of accountability and openness, because they know that they cannot answer what they have done to people of British Columbia in the last six years. We have to ask those questions, and we want the government to answer those questions.

In Burnaby-Edmonds the homelessness has doubled because of the policies of this government, and I want to ask that question about why. That's the question I want to ask tomorrow. It's important that we come back and meet tomorrow morning at ten o'clock and continue with the normal business of this House. Therefore, it's important that we must defeat this motion of adjournment. They're making a mockery of this parliamentary democracy.

It's so important that when we meet, when we discuss the issue that we are supposed to discuss.... We can only do that if we are allowed to meet and come back tomorrow morning. They are denying us that opportunity to represent people — in my case, people

of Burnaby-Edmonds. In Burnaby-Edmonds the homelessness has doubled.

Deputy Speaker: Member, please speak to the motion for adjournment to 9:05.

R. Chouhan: I am speaking on this motion to have that ability, so I can address those issues tomorrow. If I don't have that ability to come back tomorrow and ask those questions, I will not be able to ask those questions. That is part of this motion. They are denying us that opportunity. They should be ashamed of this. What are they afraid of? They're afraid because they don't want to face the people of British Columbia. Tomorrow morning when we come back, all people of the opposition are ready to ask those questions.

Mr. Speaker, if they have any respect left for any democracy in British Columbia, please withdraw this motion. It's the only way we can tell British Columbians that this House, this chamber, respects the sentiments of people of this beautiful province. Otherwise, we can't do our job. So I strongly urge all members to vote against this motion that they have moved to adjourn.

[2210]

S. Simpson: I stand to oppose the motion to adjourn to 9:05. When we look at parliament where we are here, the Legislature, this is supposed to be a pretty civilized place. It is supposed to be a place where we can engage in vigorous and heated debate over issues, but it is supposed to be a place that functions in a responsible and civilized way and respects the role we all have here as representatives of the people of British Columbia.

So the question I have is: why is this happening? Why is the decision being taken by the government to move this motion to 9:05 rather than making the decision to follow the calendar, as it sits, and allow us to come back at ten o'clock and fully engage this debate around adjournment at ten o'clock? This is what would happen if we were to follow and respect the calendar. But what's happening is that we have this motion to adjourn to 9:05.

I guess the questions that we have to ask ourselves are: does this meet public expectation of what should occur in this place? Is this what the public thinks should be happening tonight? If we went out and had the opportunity to canvass our constituents and ask them whether this is their view of what their Legislature should be doing at this time....

If we were to go out and canvass the people of British Columbia and say, "Do you think the 79 legislators in British Columbia should be preparing to sit through the night in this debate, or do you believe as the people who put us here, as the people who are our bosses, that we should be going home, getting together with our families, coming back here at a reasonable time, as the calendar and the schedule states, at ten o'clock tomorrow morning and beginning the debate in earnest over whether we should or should not be adjourning this

Legislature...?" This is the debate — really, the substantive debate — that is on the table.

We need to ask ourselves, depending on what we believe of course, about what the public view is. My view, first and foremost, is that the public wouldn't be very happy with what they've seen here. They wouldn't be very happy with the motion of the Government House Leader to adjourn to 9:05. They wouldn't think this was respectful of this place. They would think this was an abuse of this place to do this. I do believe that. I believe that the majority of people in this province would say this doesn't meet the nod test, where you say: "Does this make sense to you?" It wouldn't make sense.

You know, our constituents bring us here. They send us here. They send us here with very clear expectations. They have expectations that we will come here, we will be committed and we will use all of our faculties, all of our abilities and all of our thoughtfulness to deal with the critical issues that face the people of British Columbia, and that we will do it in the way that best allows us to do it thoughtfully and in a clear-headed manner and in a way that respects their interests and respects the traditions of this place. The 9:05 motion simply takes us in a very different direction. It doesn't allow us to do that.

There is a good reason why we have the hours that we have, why we set hours to come here at ten o'clock in the morning, to debate, to have a question period at two o'clock, to have the breaks we do and to finish when we finish. Over the years in the development of that calendar, decisions were made that that was the way to get the work of the people done in a way that allowed all members to be engaged and be thoughtful about what they could do. It was decided by people who preceded us in this place that that was what we should do, and those are pretty smart people. I think they made wise choices.

Instead, we have this situation. We have a situation now where the public will see us talk through the night, and we will talk maybe for a number of more hours on the 9:05 motion. At some point, if that motion passes — if the government doesn't come to its senses over this and that motion passes — then we will talk to the adjournment motion after that to some time into the morning.

[2215]

Well, I don't believe that's what we're looking for here. I believe that what the public really wants — and it should be the interests of the public that we most concern ourselves with — is to hear substantive debate on the issues. They want to be able to weigh the government's views and the opposition's views. They want to be able to turn on that television set....

Deputy Speaker: Member, can I bring you back to the motion to adjourn.

S. Simpson: Absolutely. Thank you for that.

They want to be able to turn it on at a time when they're up and about, not at three o'clock in the morning, and see where we're at.

They're looking for balanced, thoughtful discussion. The 9:05 motion removes that because hours from now, who knows how balanced and thoughtful we'll all be? It's a cynical strategy.

I would certainly encourage that the government reconsider this motion, the 9:05 motion, relent on this and bring us back at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. What I would encourage is that when we come back, I'd be very excited if some government members would engage in the debate we're on right now — the adjournment debate — because it'd be nice to hear the government members tell us why they think we shouldn't be here.

To use exhaustion, which is what the 9:05 motion essentially does, is to not engage in a meaningful debate. It is to abuse parliament. B.C.'ers want the opportunity to watch our deliberations, and mostly, because those folks who sit up there will talk about that, they want to hear question period.

As many of my colleagues have said before me, if we don't go back to the calendar, ten o'clock in the morning versus the 9:05 motion....

Deputy Speaker: Member, we are discussing the motion for adjournment.

S. Simpson: We are discussing the 9:05 motion, but the implications of that are ten o'clock. If we don't come back at ten o'clock tomorrow, we don't have question period. That's the implication of the 9:05 motion. I think it's important we discuss those implications. That's fundamental, and question period is fundamental to our parliamentary democracy. We can sit around the clock, or we can respect that democracy.

It's hard to view this action as more than arrogant disrespect of our democracy. If the government uses its majority to pass its legislation, that's one thing. I respect their right and their prerogative to do that. But if the government uses its majority as nothing more than a bludgeon on the integrity and aspirations of this institution, that's something very, very different.

That's exactly what the 9:05 motion does. It says the traditions of this institution, the integrity of this institution, simply aren't important. They're not important to that side of the House, so they will do whatever is available to them to beat down that democracy. That's what the 9:05 motion does.

I would hope that the government would come to its senses over this one, relent on this, allow legitimate debate to happen and allow us to retire from this place for the evening and come back in the morning by withdrawing that 9:05 motion to have that discussion. We will tell the government why the adjournment motion is a bad idea. We will tell the government why we should continue to be here for the next few days, and I would hope they would tell us why they think it's a good idea for us to leave at this time.

I would hope the government would make the decision to step back from this motion at this time.

H. Lali: I rise at this hour, which is about 10:20 p.m., to oppose this 9:05 motion that the Liberal House Leader put on the floor.

It really does smack of arrogance on the part of the government to try to circumvent the rules of this House that this government put in place to begin with. Four years ago when they put these rules in place, they thought this was good enough for everybody. Now that we have 33 members on the opposition, all of a sudden the Liberals want to change their tune — this House Leader and this government.

It really does smack of arrogance because they know we want to have reasoned debate on the original motion that is on the floor. Everybody should get to go home at around nine, 9:15 or whatever at that time, and come back fresh in the morning. I'm sure the members on the government side want us to be coherent, and we on our side know that we don't want the members on the government side to be arrogant.

[2220]

Unfortunately, they want to deny us a question period tomorrow. We have a lot of business on behalf of the constituents who put the members on the government side in place, put the opposition members in place. There is a lot of business that we want to discuss.

I know I can't ask that question now, but if I were allowed to ask a question, I'd be asking this government questions on freedom of information. But I can't ask that question, because what the Liberals want to do is go around the clock. They want to stay up all night and circumvent their own rules, and that's the height of arrogance.

Nobody on the government benches has gotten up, except for the House Leader in his initial remarks, to actually say why they want to go around the clock. We want to adjourn this House, and they don't. They want to go around the clock. Now, if there is a question period tomorrow, I have a question. I know I can't ask it here, but I have a question. I would ask a question on health care. My constituents....

Deputy Speaker: Member, would you please direct your comments to the motion to adjourn at 9:05.

H. Lali: Absolutely, hon. Speaker. That's why they put this motion on the floor — to have a recess so we can sit around the clock. They want to avoid a question period tomorrow so that the member for Yale-Lillooet can't get up to ask a question on health care. All the health care in my constituency is going down the tubes since the Liberals took office, but I can't ask that question.

Deputy Speaker: Member. Member.

H. Lali: But I can't ask that....

Deputy Speaker: Member, I've asked you to please do your debate towards the motion to adjourn at 9:05.

There is no room for latitude there. That's what we're discussing at the present time.

H. Lali: Thank you, hon. Speaker.

As I indicated, I can't ask that question, so I won't ask that question. I'm not allowed to ask that question because of this 9:05 motion about taking a bit of recess, going around the clock and obviously denying the opposition a chance for members like myself to ask questions that I would normally be able to ask in question period, had the government allowed that to happen — adjourned at a reasonable hour, come back in the morning at ten and have a question period in the afternoon, where I could probably raise questions on education. But I can't do that. I have a question, but I can't do that. I haven't asked the question. I haven't gone on that.

But it still bothers us on this side, and I know it bothers constituents out there, why the government is so afraid to come back tomorrow at a reasonable hour, at 10 a.m., to be able to do that.

Interjection.

H. Lali: Well, I think they're afraid.

Deputy Speaker: Excuse me, Member. May I remind all members in the House that they cannot make a comment unless they are in their seat.

H. Lali: So I continue, but I can't ask that question on education. Had there been a question period tomorrow, had the government allowed a question period, I'd be asking a question on tuition fees too. But I can't.

Deputy Speaker: Member, we have canvassed this three or four times now. I'm asking you to please respect the rules of the House. The latitude is the motion to adjourn at 9:05, so I'm asking you not to refer to the other areas you'd like to but to keep your comments specifically directed to that motion. It's the fourth time I have asked, Member.

H. Lali: Thank you. Again, the government wants to have a recess, wants to come back at 9:05 and continue debate around the clock — all in their efforts to avoid a question period and not allow us on the opposition side to actually do the business on behalf of the people who have put us here. But the government doesn't want to do that. They want to keep things secret and deny us that question period.

Obviously, there is a whole range of issues that we would normally raise, but we can't do that. The government still hasn't given an explanation. Nobody on their side will get up to actually debate this 9:05 motion that is before us, and one wonders why. Is there a gag order on the opposite benches? I don't know. Perhaps the House Leader, who is on the other side — he is grinning — might be able to tell us that, or some of the other folks.

Deputy Speaker: Member, if I can remind you again, you cannot comment about expressions or anyone in the House. It's a comment only on a member, so you cannot comment on any expression or any attitude that's expressed.

H. Lali: Well, I would hope.... Thank you, hon Speaker.

[2225]

M. Farnworth: Point of order, hon. Chair. I would submit to the Chair that expressions used in debate are not covered by the standing orders. I do recognize that your points around being relevant to debate are important, but in the course of that debate I do think comments around.... They're not out of order.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. So noted.

H. Lali: I won't make mention about the House Leader's....

In any case, the fact is that we have a lot of business we want to do. Under normal circumstances we would go.... The session would start at the beginning of October. I think it's the 2nd or 3rd. We would continue on. We would meet on a weekly basis.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I think we take every third week off so we can go back to our constituencies to do constituency work. Then we come back again for two or three weeks, and we take another week off to do constituency work. This would go on until the end of November. I think it's usually the last Thursday of November. We would have ample opportunity to be able to ask questions. But the government wants us to go around the clock to be able to avoid a question period.

Normally, we would sit until Thursday — I think it's November 30 — this week. So we would get in a question period Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. Three more question periods. All the opposition is attempting to do is debate the motion of adjournment that is on the floor, and we want to be able to actually adjourn at a reasonable hour — say nine-ish — and then come back in the morning when everybody is fresh. The opposition members would get up in the House and be able to have reasonable debate on issues. The members opposite the government side, whoever chooses, whether it's a minister or a backbencher, could get up and speak as well.

We would get a question period. One question period, probably, is what we would get. Normally, we would get three more. But for some reason the government wants to just go around the clock and deny the opposition their right to be able to ask a question tomorrow on a whole myriad of issues in our constituencies that I know members have raised here earlier and that I'm not allowed to raise, obviously.

Certainly, I think it behooves the members on the government side to get up and actually support the

opposition on all of this, to make sure this 9:05 motion is defeated. We can come back, and everybody can go to sleep at a reasonable hour, get up in the morning and be here fresh at 10 a.m. to go on to continue to do the work of the people of British Columbia, who elected all 79 members to be here.

We were quite prepared to come here on October 2 and meet here week after week, except for the time we were legally allowed off to go back to our constituencies, and do the people's business right up until the end of November. But the government chose not to call the Legislature. They decided to just run away and call it busywork. The opposition is just talking about busywork.

Instead, they bring us back. The government actually brings us back. We got a letter from the Speaker. It said: "You all have to come up here. You have to come up here and debate." I'm going to read from it, hon. Speaker. I think it is a very nicely worded letter on your behalf.

Regarding the reconvening of the Legislature: "After consultation with the government of the province of British Columbia, I am satisfied that the public interest requires that the House shall meet." Fantastic. Absolutely nothing wrong with that. You know, hon. Speaker, we took your word, we took the government's word that was given to you, and we came back — all 33 of us — and we've got books and books of work that we want to do.

I know we didn't get a full session out of the government. What we had was a little truncated session. This is our — what? — third day. All we're asking for is another day. We could go until November 30 and have another two more days. We're asking for one more day, one more question period, but the government is denying us that opportunity, that we would get up here on behalf of our constituents and ask all sorts of questions which are listed here.

[2230]

I have a lot of questions, but I guess I'm not allowed to raise them here because the government wants to actually go round the clock so that we're not allowed to ask all these questions that I've got listed here. I know members on this side of the House all have questions.

No, the Government House Leader might think it's busywork, but it's real work for the constituents that we represent. They send us here. They send us here to do their work on their behalf. They send us here with their cases so we can talk to the ministers and ask them questions. They send us over here in a normal session.

When the budget comes down, there are the estimates debates that take place. There are all sorts of bills that are presented by the government that we're allowed to debate, and we can ask all sorts of questions within the purview of that particular legislation. We can ask all sorts of questions in estimates, and the sky is virtually the limit. If the Minister of Transportation is debating his estimates in Transportation, I can get up and legitimately ask all sorts of questions under the Transportation Ministry. That's what the spring session is all about.

The fall session is all about whatever bills might be left over. There are a couple of bills that are on the order table right now that we can discuss, but the government has decided that 9:05.... They brought in.... They want us to go around the clock so that we don't get a chance to even ask questions in one more question period.

That's what we're really talking about, having — what? It's a 30-minute question period — 30 minutes. You know, we're not asking for a lot from the government — 30 minutes of questions. The constituents that we represent, the 33 of us on our side and a whole bunch of them — I think 46 — on the other side.... There are millions of British Columbians, and they have hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of questions that they want asked.

Interjection.

H. Lali: "Silent 46" is what the hon. member says of the opposite side. They may be silent, but we're not silent. We want to ask questions. We want to come back here tomorrow. We want to come back here the day after tomorrow and the day after that and adjourn according to the rules of the House, and we want the government to be able to afford us at least the opportunity to be able to do that.

They got rid of the session with all of those questions we would have had. Look at all this work that we have here, all of these questions that we want to ask, and they don't want us to even have a chance to ask these piddly questions — the piddly amount. They're not piddly questions. They are actually a piddly number of questions. That's what they want to deny us.

I think it's only fair that the Government House Leader actually get up and tell this House that he erred in saying that we were going to have a short recess and we're going to sit around the clock. I'm actually hoping that all of this reasoned debate that has taken place in the last couple of hours.... A number of members sitting here to my left have gotten up one after the other, on the opposition benches.

Mind you, nobody's gotten up on the government side, but we've all gotten up. We made some reasonable and passionate pleas to the Government House Leader to withdraw — or if not to withdraw, then to convince all of his colleagues that when the vote comes, it's to vote down 9:05 so we can actually have adjournment. Everybody goes home, goes to sleep at a reasonable hour. They come back in the morning. Nobody is incoherent on this side; nobody is arrogant on that side.

Then we can actually have a good debate, a valid debate, and we can have a question period. I'm sure the hon. member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca must have some good, legitimate questions that he's got to ask.

Interjection.

H. Lali: Oh, you do? There's a book full right here. A number of members sitting to my left — I know they

have questions. The member for Surrey-Newton — he's got questions. We all have questions that we'd like to ask — and a number of other folks that are sitting here.

What we would like is to make sure that the government on the other side actually.... When they stated in the election that they wanted to be fair and balanced.... This is the time to start showing some fairness and balance instead of trying to cut and run and cut and hide and say: "Sit around the clock; exhaust the opposition" — to not even go home to have a shower; no places to sleep around here.

But, you know, it's not that we're afraid of debate. I think the members on the government side are afraid to debate. I think they are afraid to debate. That's what it is. Not a single one of them has gotten up here to actually say anything in the last — how many hours is it? A long time; a number of hours. They haven't even said a single thing. They might not have any busywork, but we've got piles and piles of work, people's work, that we want to talk about, and we want to be able to raise some of those issues in a question period tomorrow.

[2235]

Mr. Speaker: Member, this has been going on and on. We are focused on the adjournment to 9:05. Now, the latitude that you have been given is greater than great, and I want you to take heed of that. The fact is you've been very repetitive and all the points have been well taken from other members of your caucus.

Come to the point of where we are. We don't need to continue repeating the same thing over. It is the adjournment debate to 9:05.

Member continues.

H. Lali: Thank you, hon. Speaker. I take your caution, and I will just wrap up and give the opportunity.... I know there's a member who is getting ready to speak.

As I said in the beginning, I rise to oppose the 9:05 motion for the recess that was put in place by the Government House Leader, because we want to be able to actually go home at a reasonable hour, and everybody comes back at ten in the morning to continue the debate that we had previously been debating.

I want to thank the Speaker for allowing me this opportunity, and I know other members have some debate that they're going to be following up with.

J. Kwan: I rise also to speak against the motion to recess the House at 9:05.

The reason why I rise to speak against this motion is for two reasons. I think that they are important reasons for us to consider. I think, more to the point, I also want to explain to the public what it is that we're doing here today and why this motion is so very essential to our democracy.

The first reason why I'm speaking against this motion is this. I have here with me the *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*, third edition. This is the bible, if

you will. It is the book that guides all of the conduct for the members in this House.

I have been around the Legislature since 1996, and I can't claim that I know or understand all of the rules that are dictated in this book. But I understand this, order number 2, which was adopted on February 10, 2004 — to which there was much fanfare when this rule was adopted in this Legislature — because I was here at that time.

At that time the then Government House Leader said this was essential to ensure that there's orderly business in this Legislature, that we know when members are coming into this House, when they're sitting and when they get to go home, under what months of the year we will engage in business in this House, under what week of the month we will engage in business in this House, under what day of the week we will engage in business in this House and under what hours of the day we will engage in business in this House.

Standing Order 2 reads:

"The time for the ordinary meeting of the House shall, unless otherwise ordered, be as follows:

- | | |
|------------|---|
| Monday: | Two distinct sittings:
10 a.m. to 12 noon
2 p.m. to 6 p.m.
2 p.m. to 9 p.m. effective the first week of
March |
| Tuesday: | Two distinct sittings:
10 a.m. to 12 noon
2 p.m. to 6 p.m. |
| Wednesday: | 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.
2 p.m. to 9 p.m. effective the first week of
March |
| Thursday: | Two distinct sittings:
10 a.m. to 12 noon
2 p.m. to 6 p.m. |

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

Then it goes on to say: "Unless otherwise ordered, the House shall meet: (i) the second Tuesday in February to the last Thursday in May inclusive; and (ii) the first Monday in October to the last Thursday in November inclusive."

Then it goes on to say, "The House shall stand adjourned during the week of Spring Vacation as provided in the *School Act*, the week of Good Friday, the week of Easter Monday, the 4th week after Easter (if Easter falls in March), the week of Victoria Day, the week of Thanksgiving Day, and the week of Remembrance Day," and: "As soon as possible after New Year's Day, the Clerk of the House shall publish a calendar which shows the days on which the House shall meet, according to the Standing Orders."

[2240]

Mr. Speaker, today is Monday. According to the standing orders of the House, the House shall sit until 9 p.m. The rules here are important, because they do provide some level of guidance of what the House business should be, as a rule of thumb, so that we can

actually engage in a civilized manner to debate the business of the people.

Here we are today at 10:40 engaging in a debate to bypass this order, to go beyond nine o'clock, to continue on debate to go around the clock. What is the purpose of breaking the rules of the House which this government brought in on February 10, 2004, which they say are essential to bring organized debate into this Legislature? For what purpose are we breaking this rule today?

Well, aside from all the other issues that my good colleagues have already raised, the key issue is this: in this very thick book, how it defines a sitting of the House is that we actually have to adjourn the day for a new day to start. When a new day starts, it would then necessitate the government and the Speaker to follow the rules of this House again, and that is to ensure that there is a question period, because it would be deemed to be a new day as a new sitting day. It's kind of archaic. People at home, I'm sure, are sitting there going: what are they talking about? What are they talking about, and how do they understand this?

The Government House Leader's approach is this. By disallowing this House to actually stop its debate, to adjourn the debate until tomorrow, it would be deemed to be one sitting, continuously, even if we went until tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. Even if we went until two o'clock in the afternoon, it would be deemed to be one sitting. By doing that, it's as though we're in some sort of time warp — that we never actually stopped, and the new day never arrived, according to the rules of this House. That prevents a question period for the opposition.

Why are the members from the opposition side taking such strong views on this? Because we do have business that we need to bring to the attention of the government, questions that we need to ask of the government. If we did agree with the Government House Leader in continuing on debate beyond 9:05, then we would have no opportunity for a question period, many of which have already been lost, because the government has decided not to call the House back in October according to the standing rules of this bible. So we've already lost many question periods.

You know, I would have thought that this opportunity for the government to be open and accountable to British Columbians would have been important for them. After all, it was the Premier, who was then the opposition leader, who promised British Columbians that he would be open and accountable. What is the hallmark of openness and accountability in a democracy? In a democracy it is the opportunity for the opposition to hold the government to account.

What is one of the most important vehicles to do that in a parliamentary setting such as ours? Well, it happens to be question period. It happens to be question period because it is the only forum in which the opposition will gather in this Legislature, which is televised to the public, in which questions are put to the executive council, in which the government has to an-

swer questions from the opposition on behalf of many British Columbians.

[2245]

That's why we're arguing this, and that's why at 10:45 we're speaking against a motion to recess at 9:05. It doesn't seem to make sense, does it? It's kind of, well, odd and weird unless you've been around this Legislature and understand those rules and why the colleagues from this side of the House have argued ever so passionately against this motion. The rules dictate that if we don't adjourn this House tonight, as the rules have set out in *Parliamentary Practice in British Columbia*, it would disallow the opposition the opportunity for a question period. The rule says so, even if we went around the clock. Never mind the notion that we might be debating around the clock and that people may well be incoherent. Never mind the fact that exhaustion in debate is not the best way to engage in debate. Never mind all of those matters.

More to the point, what is important here in our democratic system? What is important is that the government be open to the public, that the government actually faces the music, so to speak, when it comes to taking questions from the opposition. I have to ask the question: why is the government so insistent in wanting to truncate debate? What is the purpose of that?

Well, I can fathom no reason other than to stop question period. To stifle the opposition's opportunity to ask questions of the government — what purpose does it serve? Does it really serve democracy? Does it serve the constituents who voted for us and elected us to be their representatives to come to this House to do its work? Does it serve the notion that the Premier, who had promised the most open and accountable government...? Does it validate the point that the Premier had made, or does it dispute that point?

The Premier at one point said: "Openness is better than hiddenness." By shutting this debate down, by making this debate go on into the wee hours of the night against the standing orders rules, isn't that hiddenness, in the words of the Premier? Doesn't that equate hiddenness as opposed to openness, because it disallows the opposition to ask questions of the executive council during question period?

I have to wonder. The government is arguing so very much against another question period. Is the purpose, then, really so that the government doesn't have to answer questions? Isn't that the real reason why we're here today engaging in this debate at almost ten to 11? Isn't that the real reason — that the government doesn't want to answer the questions? They try to do that in every which way, by cancelling the Legislature and by trying to ram through the motion around the child and youth officer, which we dealt with earlier today, all in one day. The whole notion when the Government House Leader said that we'll be in and out of the Legislature — isn't that just to avoid debate at all costs?

That brings us right back to where we are today. It's as if we were back in time on Wednesday, when the Speaker called the House back, and the whole notion was to get in and out and get the business dealt with

and be done with it. At every turn, when the opposition said no to that, the government fought us every step of the way, and for what reason other than this: that the government does not want questions asked, because they don't have good answers. They don't have good answers for British Columbians on their policies and decisions. They don't have good answers on their management of the affairs of this province. They don't want British Columbians to know; they don't want the opposition to hold their feet to the fire. Isn't that the reason why the Government House Leader is using every single tactic in this Legislature to stifle debate?

[2250]

You will then understand, Mr. Speaker, why we on this side of the House want to fight that. It wasn't so long ago, certainly within my memory, that there were only two opposition members in this House. The government did that amply. You'd think that was sort of enough to fill them for the next few years.

We now have 33 opposition members here, and the government no longer can play that game. By sheer numbers, they cannot play that game. There is a role for the opposition to play in a democracy. There is a role for the government — to follow their own rules when they said that they would. They brought forward their own standing orders back in February of 2004 and said that these are the rules that we'll now follow. They made such a big fanfare about it, including the Premier and the current Government House Leader.

Then why are we here today breaking all of those rules? Once again, the government is using its majority in order to ram those rules through to benefit the only agenda, the agenda of hiding what really is going on in British Columbia....

H. Bains: Secrecy.

J. Kwan: The agenda of secrecy, as my good colleague said. The agenda of not being held to account, the agenda of hiding behind rules so that the government does not have to answer questions to British Columbians.

You might ask: what are those questions? There are so many questions that one hardly knows where to begin, Mr. Speaker. There are so very many questions on which this government should be answering to British Columbians, whether it be over the issue around the Olympics, whether it be over the issue of the Premier, who just made an offhand comment around....

Deputy Speaker: Member, please direct your comments to the adjournment from 9:05.

J. Kwan: The adjournment of 9:05 is precisely that. It's so the government executive council would not have to answer questions. That is the only reason that they would break every rule of the House, including their own standing orders that they brought in back in February of 2004. It's the only tool they could use to stop the opposition, in this very Legislature, from ensuring that the questions from the public are put to

them so that they are put in a place where they actually have to face the music directly. That's why.

Let's just be honest for one moment about why we're really here. We have yet to hear from any government member, with the exception of the House Leader, about how they really feel about that. Do members really feel proud of the fact that, by sheer majority, they can use a tactic in the Legislature to shut down the House so that the opposition doesn't get to put questions to the government? I do wonder.

I challenge the government members, any of them, to have the courage to stand up and defend democracy — the time-honoured tradition of question period — to allow for the House to adjourn, to defeat the Government House Leader's motion to recess at 9:05 and to support the motion to adjourn the House until tomorrow so that we can get back here and engage in orderly business in a civilized way and in the way in which the government had committed to, a new tone in this Legislature, and get on with what is important in this House and allow the opposition to do its work.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Hon. M. de Jong: I move the motion, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the motion is that this House stands adjourned until 9:05.

Motion approved on the following division:
[2255-2300]

YEAS — 41

Falcon	Reid	Coell
Ilich	Chong	Christensen
Les	Richmond	Bell
Bennett	van Dongen	Roddick
Hayer	Lee	Nuraney
Whittred	Horning	Cantelon
Thorpe	Hagen	Oppal
de Jong	Taylor	Bond
Hansen	Penner	Neufeld
Coleman	Hogg	Sultan
Krueger	Lekstrom	Mayencourt
Polak	Hawes	Yap
Bloy	MacKay	Black
McIntyre		Rustad

NAYS — 27

S. Simpson	Evans	Farnworth
Kwan	Brar	B. Simpson
Cubberley	Hammell	Coons
Thorne	Simons	Puchmayr
Gentner	Routley	Lali

Dix	Bains	Robertson
Karagianis	Ralston	Krog
Austin	Chouhan	Wyse
Sather	Macdonald	Conroy

Mr. Speaker: The member for Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows continues with the debate on the original motion.

On the motion to adjourn (*continued*).

M. Sather: I wanted to take the remaining time that I had to conclude my remarks about the discussion regarding agriculture, which I know is also very important to the member for Kamloops-North Thompson. However, I don't think it's shared by a lot of his colleagues, unfortunately.

One of the issues with regard to the devastation that's happening to Formosa Nursery in my constituency.... As I mentioned earlier, to correct this issue would be a matter of moving a roadway 35 metres, which sounds like nothing. When parties, including myself, have tried to get this simple-seeming thing done, we've been informed that the problem is that a contract has already been signed. If the roadway were to be moved, the contractor would invoke significant charges in the millions of dollars, and that would be foisted upon municipalities. Naturally enough, they aren't keen on taking on such a liability.

The contractor for the Golden Ears Bridge is a P3 contract, a public-private partnership, which this government is very fond of, as we know. The Premier has even instituted further restrictions upon municipal governments recently in that they must make available any contracts they have over \$20 million to a P3 contract.

Well, this is a P3 contract, and notwithstanding it's well over budget, that's not the issue I wanted to speak to this evening. I wanted to speak to the fact that there is no latitude, no possibility, no room for discussion with regard to a contractor who, quite frankly, is not closely attached to the community.

One has to wonder, in fact, how much concern a corporation from Germany — in this case Bilfinger Berger — actually has about agriculture in British Columbia and the survival of the family farm. I had the opportunity to speak to Mr. John McArthur. He's the president of Bilfinger Berger BOT Inc. of Canada, the Canadian subsidiary of the parent company, and he's a nice enough man. We had a couple of good conversations, I thought. But simply put, the interest and the motivation were not there to assist this family.

[2305]

When I talked to TransLink directors about this issue and how absolutely insane it was that this farm was going to be destroyed as a result of a very bad decision, and couldn't something be done about it, I was told that had this contract been a TransLink contract — had it been one of their own, had they been financing it, had they been building it and had they been fulfilling the work that Bilfinger Berger is doing

or the Golden crossing joint venture with Bilfinger being the principal behind it — that would have been possible. There would have been flexibility to do what needs to be done for this family and for agriculture in British Columbia.

I wanted to point out again one of the drawbacks. There are many, but this is one of the other drawbacks with regard to the pet projects of the Premier being public-private partnerships. The flexibility isn't there. The motivation isn't there. Quite frankly, what does Bilfinger Berger care about Formosa Nursery or about the family farm, or about agriculture in Canada or in British Columbia?

I submit that there are many causes for the government to reconsider their boundless enthusiasm for P3 contracts. This is just another of the many drawbacks to such contracting that I know the government has deaf ears to. It's like some sort of religion. They have drunk the Kool-Aid of P3, and it's very difficult to get through to this government about anything that is a downside. As I said, there are many. Nonetheless, we keep on trying on this side.

Finally, I wanted to say that this connector itself will, as I said before, go through prime agricultural land in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. Not only will it alienate agricultural land and disrupt the farming operations of two of our major and oldest dairy farms, not to mention the Formosa Nursery.... Not only will it disrupt their operations, but it's going to put a lot of pressure to develop the land that will lie between that connector and the urban boundary.

It's going to put a lot of pressure to develop that, to alienate that land from the agricultural land reserve. Some have even said that's part of the plan here. I wouldn't be paranoid about that, but I see what's happening.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Many in the communities see what's happening. They listen to the rhetoric. They see the developers lining up. They see the desire to convert viable agricultural land into what they consider a higher value. In this case the primary candidate is an industrial park in that particular area. I have to say that it's really galling to me. I have to also say that with the encouragement — tacitly, if nothing else — of this government, it's very disappointing to me to see the pattern of development that happens in my community.

I'm in a community of expanding population and tremendous growth in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows — particularly Maple Ridge, though. What I see happening is that one subdivision after another is built, and no provision is ever made during that time to set aside any land for an industrial or a business park. In fact, the land that we do have along the river, which has been industrial for a long time, is being alienated for residential use.

I see the developers going for the plum, which is residential development. They can make more money in that than they can in industrial. Then after all that is

done, they're looking around and saying: "Oh my gosh, we have no industrial land. What are we going to do? Oh, look. There's some agricultural land over there. Why don't we just get some of that? It's cheap, after all." This is the pattern that's happening in my community.

[2310]

This Minister of Agriculture has to stand up to the realities, has to show that there's meaning behind his words and of others, like the member for Delta North, who often talk in this House about the importance of agriculture. There has to be real meaning behind that. There has to be action behind the words. Unfortunately, all too often the government is about a lot of words and very little action. With that, I would like to conclude my remarks.

D. Routley: I rise again to speak now, this time on the motion to adjourn this House before the scheduled end date of the 30th of this month, and I rise again to implore all of us to do the best we can.

We have, in fact, come to this place to represent our communities, to bring the issues that they face on a day-to-day basis throughout the province to this House on a day-to-day basis, not only at the whim of this government and not purely for the conceived purpose of this government.

I believe we have come here to do our best for the people, to do our best for ourselves, and we're here to ensure on this side of the House that that side of the House is accountable for the choices they make. We're here to ensure that the outcomes of this government's policies are what they stand up to account for, and that is what this government is running from.

You're hearing from an opposition all of those issues that those millions of British Columbians face, those hundreds of issues that have not had the chance to be aired in this House properly. We've had three question periods this fall. This is sad. We've been called back to do one item of business, and we've agreed to do that business. Yes, we put it off a few days so that other issues could be brought to this House. But this government didn't want to hear any of that.

We saw them contemptuously and arrogantly adjourn this House from morning to afternoon, from afternoon to morning — all in an effort to avoid being brought to account by this side of the House and all in an effort to avoid the scrutiny of the people of British Columbia. I think it's absolutely disgraceful. I'm ashamed. I came here with the best intention to serve my community, and I am being denied that opportunity by this government that seeks to adjourn this House early. That is disgraceful.

This government is afraid to face the people. This government has a contempt for democracy that knows no bounds. This government employs bully tactics, whether it's towards municipal governments, teachers, children or the homeless. This government is heartless, hardhearted and relentless in assailing the conditions of ordinary British Columbians.

Ordinary British Columbians were treated to the insult of the House Leader describing these issues as

busywork. Busywork — the business of British Columbia. Busywork — the business of protecting our forests. The busywork of addressing aboriginal needs. The busywork of addressing a skill shortage that poses a great competitive threat. The busywork of homelessness. The busywork of housing. The busywork of poverty. The busywork of affordability. The busywork of global warming. The busywork of agriculture in this province.

This is disgraceful, contemptuous and an insult to British Columbians. The busywork of transportation issues — highways, ferries. The busywork of health — hospice care, ER crises, surgery wait-lists, home care cuts. Busywork.

[2315]

The busywork of women's issues. The busywork of closing women's centres. The busywork of ignoring the people of British Columbia. The busywork of allowing the homeless to suffer. This government and its arrogance know no bounds.

A few issues from my riding, Cowichan-Ladysmith, ground zero of the forestry crisis and ground zero of the crisis of raw log export. We see this government trade away our future. We see them trade away our resources for minimum benefit to our communities. Raw log exports — how can we call that doing our best? How can we call that extracting full value for British Columbians? A softwood deal that condemns our value-added sector and that condemns our manufacturing to never being able to attract the capital investment needed to resurrect this fine and renewable industry.

In forestry the issue of worker safety, as we saw scores of British Columbians lose their lives in the woods this past year. Just a few weeks ago I was on a logging switchback between Lake Cowichan and Port Renfrew. We stopped the pickup truck we were in and took out a transit. We measured the grade at that point to be 34 percent.

The logging trucks along that road have to be hauled up backwards by winch from bulldozers so that they can then be released to shoot down the hill barely under control, in many cases not in control at all. They risk their lives on a day-to-day, hour-to-hour, minute-to-minute basis. I thought it was terrible. The road was shale; it was slimy and slick and slippery. I felt as though I was going to slide down the hill just standing there. I'm amazed that there is anyone in this province who would have the talent and the skill to be able to pilot a logging truck loaded with timber down that road.

Two days later a logging truck rolled over the bank at that very point and plummeted over 500 feet to the valley floor below, breaking into a million pieces. That driver jumped and saved himself, but over 80 percent of drivers who jump are killed by their own trailer. Yes, there have been fewer deaths, but the close calls mount, and but for luck, there would be so many more dead because this government has refused to take action, refused to hear the pleas of our communities.

In my community of Duncan, there was an inquest earlier this year into the death of a faller named Ted

Gramlich. The recommendations of the coroner pointed directly to this government and the severing of the responsibility chain for safety that they carried out. This is not busywork. The widow of that faller, Debbie Geddes, would be horrified by that description of this issue. I've seen her cry. I sat through the hours and hours of testimony at that inquest. I've watched the executives squirm over responsibility. Everyone was there to hear her, except for the members on that side. Now I don't have adequate opportunity to bring that life-and-death issue to this House — that piece of busywork.

I come from Cowichan, the home of the largest aboriginal band by population in this province. In that community they know that off-reserve cuts equal on-reserve cuts. They know that the thousand-odd members of their community who live off reserve — when they face welfare cuts, when they are evicted because of the poor Residential Tenancy Act of this government, when they face cuts to services of health — go back to the reserve and seek help there. They overburden an already overburdened social safety net on reserve.

[2320]

This government can't hide from the conditions on reserve because they don't feel it's their jurisdiction. The glass that overflows, overflows into the reserve, and it overflows from a content too heavy, placed there by this government. This government — cynical, uncaring, thoughtless.

Busywork, I suppose — the homelessness of the aboriginal people in my community. Busywork — their addictions and the services they require. Busywork — busy, busy, busywork.

This government's own Competition Council identified the skills shortage as the number-one threat to the sustainability of this economy — the number-one threat after this government dismantled the ITAC system and replaced it with a single sheet of paper describing how private sector would take over that responsibility. No means, no regulation, no resources — just a one-page description. That'll do it. The marketplace will take care of it. Exit stage right for this government and its role in our communities.

Well, it has given up its right to govern when it comes to homelessness, when it comes to forestry, when it comes to so many of the issues that confront people on a life-and-death basis every day in this province and that have been ignored by the members on that side — a side that has refused to hear. No matter what volume is brought to the issue, they don't listen. They don't hear, and they don't care because of course, Madam Speaker, this is busywork. Busywork — homelessness. Busy, busy, busywork. Busywork to count the homeless. Busywork to report on their deaths due to exposure, to fire. Busywork for coroners, for communities to pick up the pieces of a broken society — broken by this government that has fragmented the foundation stones that this province was built upon. That's busywork.

Busywork is poverty and 23.5 percent of the children in this province living below the poverty line.

Children don't live in isolation, do they? No, they live with families in poverty. But this government doesn't care about that. This government doesn't care to hear about that. More busywork for the poor children of British Columbia. More busywork for the members of this Legislature.

It has no corporate interest. It has no profit motive. It has no profit potential, these poor children. They're not the interest of this government. We can see them on their donors list, can't we? We can see who gets the attention of this government. They get it at a price. The price of that attention is the homeless; the dead forest workers; the aboriginal peoples who suffer, and continue to suffer, through the empty words of a government that promises them much and delivers little, the empty words of great golden goals, the New Relationship, literacy. The most literate jurisdiction in North America — that's our great golden goal. We spend the least of any province in this country on community-based literacy projects. Empty words.

We have heard a government diminish the interests of British Columbians such as to describe them as busywork. This is sad. It is sad that a noble and wonderful and gracious and graceful province like British Columbia should suffer a government that would liquidate the assets of this province, ignore the struggles of its citizens and give favour only to those who are their friends. That is sad, and that is, I suppose, more busywork.

[2325]

Right around this province people are grappling with the reality of global warming. In my own community every year the survival of the fish stock of the Cowichan River is in question. It's not a question that we can afford to sit back and debate back and forth on. This is an urgency. Every year in the Cowichan River the flow comes to within 0.2 cubic metres of decimating our fish stocks, within 0.5 cubic metres of shutting down our pulp mill.

This year we saw extreme weather events that have flooded homes, that have sent torrential floods of earth, trees and water down our naked slopes. And we'll see more of that every year — more extreme weather events, none of which have been adequately planned for, none of which have been adequately addressed, none of which this government is interested in hearing about, because I suppose it's more busywork.

More busywork: the homes in Lake Cowichan that were flooded. More busywork: our bare slopes and our bare valley bottoms. More busywork: the water quality of our rural communities impacted by poor forest practices implemented by this government. More busywork: the boiling of water. That's a busy job. More busywork: the polluting of our wells, the loss of our watersheds.

Agriculture — the viability of an ALR that we consider the gem of our province. It can never survive as pastoral landscape or a museum piece. This government must take the steps to make small-scale farming and meat processing viable again, to protect the small business people who rely upon it and the communities

who depend on our agricultural land base. But it's more busywork — more busywork unworthy of this government's attention.

Transportation issues. The people of Kuper Island, all of them first nations, can't afford to get on the ferry to ride and go to the store or go to the work that they don't have. This government is set to increase their fares again — more busywork for the poor people of Kuper Island, keeping their community alive in the face of a government that doesn't care about them.

These are the issues that ought to be brought to this House, ought to have been brought to this House in early October and ought still to be heard in this House until the end of November. But no, they're not worthy of this government's attention, not worthy of this government's consideration, because it doesn't care.

Health care. Our hospice society is so pressed — a completely volunteer effort. The volunteers are aging. The volunteers need the care and the service that they once gave to others. Sixty percent of the referrals for our hospice society come directly from the Vancouver Island Health Authority, yet there's no funding. They rely on the service, but they won't fund it.

An ER crisis. In Cowichan hospital quite regularly we have three nurses in our emergency room. If one of those nurses is in an extremely acute situation requiring one-on-one attention and one of those nurses ends up in an ambulance doing a transportation, which often happens, then we have 18 emergency beds addressed by one nurse. In Victoria General, with a lower level of emergency visits per year, they enjoy a staff of eight or nine. It's similar in Nanaimo.

That injustice should not be occurring in my riding, and I would like to bring that to this House in a fashion other than trying to wedge it like a big foot in a small shoe into an adjournment debate. That's the purpose of question period, that's the purpose of reasoned debate, and that's the purpose of a legislature and a calendar, all of which have been disgraced by this government and its refusal to listen.

[2330]

Surgery wait-lists that grow and grow and grow. Patients in my riding are told: "Sorry, we've reached our quota this year. You have to wait till next year. But the wait-list is too great for next year — maybe the year after that. Of course, we have this private option for you." Busywork. Busy, busy busywork not worthy of the attention of this government.

Madam Speaker, this is an arrogance and a contempt for democracy that shows no bounds, that apparently has no limit and that disgraces the honour of this province. I look to staff in this building and in this chamber who have sat here, some for more than 40 years, and I wonder if they have ever seen such a level of arrogance, such a level of dismissiveness to the issues of British Columbians — disgraceful as that is — and what that must do to their pride and service to this province, what that must do to their appreciation of the legacy of democracy that we've been handed, how it must make them feel to witness this version with all of its attendant arrogance and contempt.

This is demoralizing, and it's sad. It's sad for British Columbia. This is a sad government — a sad government that has behaved as if it were a bailiff, that has liquidated the assets of this province, sold off the best to their friends and highest bidders and left us to pick up the pieces with what's left.

They are dismantlers. They have taken those seats to dismantle the purpose of government — to stand for our people, our environment and our communities — and to instead appoint themselves mere contracting agents, to arm's-length themselves from the scrutiny and accountability of this House. It's a sad, sad outcome.

Lastly, I would like to pose a question. Why are we here? Why are we here but to bring these issues to this floor? Why are we here but to examine the record of a government? Why are we sitting here in these benches, paid by the people who sent us here with their greatest hopes and expectations and trust in our hands?

We are here to force that government to listen. We will be the hearing aid they might require. We will turn up the volume to whatever level necessary, but they will hear the people of B.C. They cannot hide from this province, and they cannot hide from us. We will make them accountable, even if we have to wedge that big foot into the small shoe of an adjournment debate. No matter what means, no matter what way, we will use every tool available to us to bring this government to account for the terrible choices they've made and the drastically difficult and terrifying, horrifying outcomes that we see out there in the snow — the homelessness, the poverty, those huddled masses of people who hope for more and are delivered only hopelessness by this government.

Well, they have hope on this side, Madam Speaker. They have hope because we know that they are citizens too, and we know that this government was elected to govern for all British Columbians — not just those narrow few that they call their friends.

Lucky for us there's been this made-in-North-America housing boom. Lucky for me. My daughter's boyfriend is working steadily. When I drop him off at the construction site, I'm glad he has that job, but this government can't take credit for that. This Premier didn't encourage the boomers to retire, and he certainly can't do it twice.

[2335]

This government is enjoying the benefit of a made-in-North-America housing boom that they have coupled with a made-in-B.C. poverty boom the likes of which this province has never seen, and that is shameful. It is shameful beyond any description in this House that this rich province should lead the country in child poverty, that this rich and wonderful place we call British Columbia should have a 23.5-percent poverty rate amongst children.

That the women, the children and the families of this province can hope for no more is a disgrace, a condemnation of their record. The homelessness, the poverty — these are signs of social policies gone wrong, of failure. This government will hear those words. As

uncomfortable as they are, they will hear those words. They will witness that horrible, horrible crop. They will reap what has been sown by their bad choices.

The problem is that it will be others who pay that price for them. But they will hear, because we will make sure they hear.

B. Ralston: Since we last adjourned, on May 18, 2006.... It's now almost six months later. I'd like to raise some of the issues that constituents of mine in Surrey-Whalley have provided to me at my constituency office and in meetings I've had in the community — and from various groups that have made representations to me.

Certainly, if our role here is to be something more than an empty formality.... People see that obligation as part of the duties that we take on when we assume this job, and they look for confirmation that these issues have been raised in the Legislature in Victoria, as people see it. They see that as an important part of the job of a member of the opposition: to make representations to the government in an effort to draw attention to problems, to hope that the government will listen to concerns, to propose alternatives and generally to raise issues that are of concern within the constituency.

There are a number of issues that I want to briefly touch upon that have been raised in my constituency, and I want to address them briefly in this speech. I also want to talk about some of the work that I was able to do and some of the views that I've formed as a result of my participation in the Committee on Finance and Government Services, the all-party committee that toured the province as part of the budget process for the budget in 2007.

One of the issues that concerns people — and this is related to the general trend of deregulation within the approach the government has taken since 2001 — is the unsupervised and unlicensed recovery homes that are moving into residential areas and not being watched over or monitored by government. They create social problems within the neighbourhoods where they reside.

The municipal government does have a role in monitoring the zoning of these operations. Typically, they will move in without seeking the appropriate zoning approval, but the internal operation of those so-called recovery houses is a matter that was formerly regulated by the provincial government and is no longer.

People bring to me this complaint about those kinds of operations heading into neighbourhoods with really, ostensibly, a program of assisting those who are recovering from addictions. No one would deny that that's an important health issue, a public health issue, but the actual program that's provided in many of these places, according to people who are there, is really minimal or nonexistent.

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What they exist to do is simply to collect the cheques for the shelter allowance provided under social assistance. Very little, if any, service is provided to those people to combat the addictions that they suffer

from. It's a misuse of government resources, and it's a failure to answer what is a real concern in many communities: the problem of addiction and what it leads to in terms of other behaviours and social problems — in particular, crime at the street level and the sense that some people have in many neighbourhoods that their neighbourhood is not safe.

That's an issue that has been brought to my attention. I would have hoped that we would have more opportunity to address it here in the Legislature, but apparently that is not to be.

The issue of housing is an important one, and the issue of housing has several dimensions to it. Obviously, there's the concern that many members have raised about the issue of homelessness. Indeed, the homelessness count performed by the Greater Vancouver regional district has shown a steady increase in the number of documented homeless persons within the lower mainland of British Columbia, but it's not a problem that's confined to the lower mainland. In many of the smaller towns and regional centres and bigger cities throughout the province, many people have remarked upon the anecdotal evidence, but also the documented evidence, of an increase in homelessness.

This is not just a problem that touches people's moral sensibilities. This is also a problem that, for example, here in the city of Victoria has an impact upon the perception of people who visit the city as tourists. They are an important part of the economic drivers of this particular city, Victoria, and other cities — Vancouver — where that kind of perception is obviously regarded as being a negative and has led to questions and concerns not simply by those citizens who see people living on the street as a social injustice and a wrong but by those people who share that perception and also have a sense of the economic consequences that flow from people coming and visiting a society that treats some part of its population in that way. It has a real economic consequence.

B.C. Business has chronicled, for example, that tourism in the city of Victoria is declining, and many of the businesses that rely upon tourism as a source of their revenue are expressing growing concern. It's similarly a concern in Vancouver and other cities throughout the province. Other cities which would attempt to attract conventions and other forms of public gatherings see that as a real detractor from the kind of business they seek to build. Homelessness has many dimensions, and that's another one that is increasingly commented upon by people in business.

One of the other dimensions of the housing crisis is assisted housing. It's recognized that beyond the program that's been developed — assisted living, so-called.... It has really diverted much of the money that was formerly directed to social housing within the province. The federal government left the field some time ago. The provincial government in 2001 abandoned any attempt at a housing supply program and diverted that money into what's called assisted living.

It's widely recognized that that has been a contributing factor to the general deterioration of the housing

stock as a whole and to the further incidence of sub-standard housing and homelessness and people living in marginal, unhealthy accommodation. I think it's fair to say that this is not radical stuff.

Recently an article by, I believe, Gary Mason in the *Globe and Mail* chronicled the fact that in New York, the heart of the market society, presided over by Mayor Bloomberg.... He's a very successful business person — a billionaire. He recognizes that it's important to spend public money to develop assisted housing. Indeed, in the city of New York tens of thousands of units are added to the stock every year. It's regarded as being an important part of the overall picture of housing.

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It's certainly not the majority, nor is it intended to be, but for that portion of the population that requires this assistance, it's part of the housing mix. It's part of the social objectives of what's regarded as being the heart of the market society and a thriving entrepreneurial centre globally.

These are not social measures that are unexamined elsewhere and where solutions are found elsewhere. Really, it's a complete failure of imagination and responsibility on the part of this particular government to simply not deal with that problem because it's somehow going to be left to market forces. That's while the construction industry and the condo industry is doing well at this point.

There's obviously still a sector, a section of the housing market, that will not be provided for in that way. It's required, and it's recognized that in places like New York and in the example I've just given, there is a role for government to assist in full housing stock for everyone within the society.

The other issue that arises in housing, and I don't think we should lose sight of this, is that given the housing prices, the issue of middle-class affordability for entry-level housing, for market housing for people who are purchasing housing for the first time, becomes important. Indeed, in larger cities around the globe — and Vancouver and the lower mainland may not be at this point but are getting close to this point — if your housing stock and the cost of housing reaches a point where it becomes unaffordable for the people that do the work within the city....

If you think of public sector workers in the city of London, in England, for example, it becomes increasingly difficult to have people be within commuting distance of the centre of the city in order to do the work that makes a city tick. The whole issue then becomes one of: how do you provide housing stock for those people?

Probably a microcosm of that problem is the problem that is encountered in the resort municipality of Whistler, where in order to be able to hire workers to do the work that enables the resort to run, some employers are forced to provide, and incur the business expense of providing, accommodation to their workers in order that they can have people to do the jobs.

There are many dimensions to the issue of housing affordability. It's clear that aside from the very limited program that was introduced by the Minister Respon-

sible for Housing not too long ago — which is a very limited application, a very narrowly focused program — there's very little imagination or appetite to address those particular problems.

Also, in my riding one of the major issues is transportation. That issue takes many forms. The issue of the Pattullo Bridge is an important one. The Pattullo Bridge was constructed over a two-year period, in 1936 and 1937. As one could readily tell from those dates, it's now a very dated piece of engineering and is viewed by many as responsible in its construction — the narrow width of the lanes and its unusual construction, with a curve at the south end of the bridge — for being particularly susceptible to a dangerous series of fatal accidents that have dogged the bridge over the last 15 or 20 years.

In response to that, that issue has been raised by many people, including the city council of Surrey, who have asked the Solicitor General, because it's his jurisdiction, to install a speed camera on the bridge. Indeed, the Minister of Transportation at one point opined that that would be a good idea. I suppose he was persuaded that that was a bad idea by the Solicitor General, and he retracted that opinion. The opinion of the Solicitor General prevailed, that he was not going to undertake that particular project.

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This is not radical, heady stuff. This is supported by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the traffic detachment — who, although they engage in vigorous enforcement at both ends of the bridge, would regard it as important assistance in making sure that people observe the speed limit and, therefore, cause fewer crashes where there are life-threatening injuries or fatalities on the bridge.

The issue is to some extent brushed aside by the Minister of Transportation because the bridge is formally under the jurisdiction of TransLink. The Minister of Transportation has directed much attention to the governance structure of TransLink, which seems to hold a particular fascination for the minister. The substantive issue of this particular bridge and its impact upon day-to-day commuters and citizens on both sides of the Fraser River in the north part of Surrey doesn't seem to have his attention to the same degree.

It's obviously time that as part of an overall transportation scheme, the replacement of this bridge be considered. The irony of it is that in the government's Gateway proposal the Pattullo Bridge is designated as the untolled, the non-tolled, alternative to what's proposed in terms of tolling on other proposed bridges on other parts of the Fraser.

When the bridge is at capacity, it's dangerous, and it's crowded. The government, apparently in all seriousness, is putting it forward as an untolled alternative. That seems, to many in my part of the world and to those people who commute across it regularly, to be simply impractical and unrealistic, and it needs to be re-examined and rejected.

The issue of health care is a continuing concern for residents in Surrey. The member for Surrey—Panorama

Ridge has spoken of the peregrinations of the government when it comes to the issue of Surrey Memorial Hospital. It was a very important issue in the run-up to the 2005 election.

A promise was made to begin construction of an ambulatory care centre in 2007. This was after a report directed by the then acting CEO of the Fraser health region in an exhaustive study of all options. That was promised before the election. A study was done. A promise was made to begin construction in 2007 — now apparently delayed.

One can well imagine that with the pressure of the major public infrastructure that's required in the run-up to the Olympics, the deadline may well recede further into the future as well. I'm sure it's only a coincidence, but it's a significant coincidence, that while public confidence in Surrey Memorial Hospital has diminished and been buffeted by a series of events over recent years, the same Dr. Godley who's proposing to open a private emergency facility in Vancouver is similarly proposing a private hospital in the Newton area of Surrey.

When the effect of government policy is to diminish public confidence in public institutions, perhaps it's not surprising that a private entrepreneur steps forward with a proposal that will attempt to replace part of the required medical services for the population of over 400,000 people who are in Surrey. I don't detect a conspiracy there, but certainly, when the cumulative effect is to undermine public confidence in public institutions, it's hardly surprising that that's a fertile ground for private medicine. Indeed, that's what appears to be taking place in Surrey.

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It is very disturbing. The responses of the Minister of Health that we heard earlier today in the House, in question period, where Dr. Godley has said publicly.... In an interview published in the *Province* on Sunday last, just two days ago, in which he says, when asked how people who can't afford the services of the private emergency clinic in Vancouver would pay for it, his response was — and I'm paraphrasing here — to pay for it by old-fashioned methods, including barter.

One just recoils in shock and horror at what's being contemplated. What kind of universe, what kind of civil society is being contemplated when very medically necessary procedures — his publicist mentioned broken limbs — are proposed to be paid for by barter? It's shocking. It's as if the history of medicare, introduced in the 1960s in the provinces in Canada, had never existed.

In any event, those are among the concerns that, particularly the people in my riding who rely on public services.... Given the median incomes and the occupations and the general economic circumstances of most people in my riding, very few of them, I imagine, will be able to afford or, indeed, be inclined to prefer or seek out private services.

Having had some experience in another profession, in terms of the practice of law, and asking people on occasion to pay fees, sometimes to fight a criminal charge that may affect their livelihood.... Most people

have relatively limited means to pay more than a few thousand dollars. To seriously contemplate, as a public policy, demanding that people barter for medically necessary procedures is just a major step backwards socially.

We have to look at that in perspective. The medical system in Canada is regarded as an economic advantage. The president of the Toronto Stock Exchange said in a speech in New York not too long ago that one of the economic advantages, the competitive advantages, of this country vis-à-vis our major trading partner, the United States, is a public medical system — that it's a burden in the United States that private companies have to bear.

Indeed, the auto industry is now seeking relief from the American Congress just for that reason: to escape from their contracted obligations as an employer to give a program of medical care to their employees, not only present but retired. And that's obviously an advantage in attracting employees, but it's also a financial burden.

In Canada we've made a social decision to share that burden more broadly, publicly. The result is therefore fairly characterized as an economic advantage. Yet that seems to be lost on the members opposite in their willingness to give way and — in particular, the Minister of Health — simply to not enforce and to lose sight of the principles of the Canada Health Act, which motivated the people who put into place the public system that we have. It's admittedly imperfect, but a long way ahead of what awaits those 40 million or 50 million Americans who have no medical insurance at all and those others who deal with health maintenance organizations, HMOs, whose very profitability depends upon denying people coverage rather than assisting them when they become ill.

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Among the other issues that are raised by those who come to my office, and who I've met with, is the issue of public transportation. In the Gateway program there's an emphasis upon the movement of goods and commuting, but there's not the same emphasis given to public transportation. I hear complaints regularly. When you look at the route map of TransLink — and that is where the most frequent and the most comprehensive bus service is — it's not in Surrey.

The development that's built up over 30 or 40 years, of a suburban pattern, has made for many low-density neighbourhoods, although that is changing. Frequently I hear complaints about bus service by those people who would choose, or who are obliged by circumstance and income, to rely on public transportation. It's simply not the frequency, not the convenience and not the safety that people would wish for.

By safety, it's frequently brought to my attention by individuals about what has taken place at various SkyTrain stations. There was a particularly outrageous — although it's difficult to imagine a murder that's not outrageous in some way — touching and dramatic murder of a young man at the Central SkyTrain station in Surrey, which has given rise to public concern about the safety of the SkyTrain facilities.

Now, admittedly, TransLink is tackling that problem to some extent, but if the public policy wishes that people use public transportation, that they travel to and from their place of work, that they travel in the evenings and not use their private automobile because it has all the good consequences that we're aware of, people have to feel secure in doing so. When it's not secure, there are problems. That lack of public confidence undermines our wish to make what's sometimes called the modal shift — in other words, a greater percentage of people using public transit than using private automobiles.

I think the general view of people is that the transportation network is not what one would wish for in a city of 400,000 people and rapidly growing. I am sometimes approached.... I attended this fall — along with other members, including you, Madam Speaker, and my other colleagues: the member for Surrey-Newton, the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge, the member for Delta North — the formal opening of SFU Surrey.

An important event, it's a consequence for the region, given that the demographic profile of students in the South Fraser — that is, the area south of the Fraser River — shows that it has the lowest percentage of adult males, particularly from 18 to 25, in post-secondary education among many regions in British Columbia. So it's much to be wished for to encourage further participation in post-secondary education.

What I've heard from people is that they would wish for further opportunities to pursue their education at SFU Surrey. The number of spaces that have been funded is only envisaged to be 5,000 spaces by 2015 in a city of 400,000. It's about 2,500 now. In my view — and I've expressed this view to the Minister of Advanced Education and to the president of the university — a much more ambitious and aggressive expansion of student places at SFU Surrey is warranted and would appear to be required by the population demand for those spaces.

That would appear to coincide with what many regard as the requirement for a competitive and vibrant economic future. Post-secondary education and post-secondary training — whether it be in trades and technology, in science, in engineering, in arts and communication at the post-secondary level and at the college level — are required. Those opportunities should be provided for those in Surrey as well as in other places.

[0005]

I want to shift at this point, if I might, to a discussion of some of the experiences that took place as a participant in the Finance and Government Services Committee. The Finance and Government Services Committee is an all-party committee that tours the province as part of the budget process. It formally constitutes advice to the minister, although I suppose the minister can pick and choose or ignore totally any of the recommendations that are put forward by the committee. But it is certainly a useful process in the sense of canvassing public opinion in 16 towns and cities throughout the province where, in addition to

providing written and on-line submissions, people are entitled to come forward and speak personally with the committee and advise them on what they think the priorities of government ought properly to be.

Although the government attempted to frame the debate in a way that would have people offer opinions as to where they might cut the budget in addition to where they might seek to expand spending, there were relatively few, if any, views on where the budget might be cut, even from groups that would profess a keener interest in budgetary and fiscal restraint than perhaps one might otherwise expect.

I see the light has turned red, Madam Speaker, and I suppose that suggests my time has elapsed. Although I have much more to say, I'm constrained by the rules. I'm sure my constituents would prefer that I speak longer, but I'll respect that and conclude my remarks at this point.

G. Coons: I rise on the motion to adjourn.

Hon. Speaker, this is about arrogance and how the arrogance of this Premier and this government is once again highlighted by their misguided insistence that we did not need a fall sitting due to the fact there were no issues, none, that needed or deserved debate and that there is nothing more than mere busywork to be done. The business of government and of this House is not finished, as far as this side of the House is concerned. We need to finish this session when it was scheduled, and I'm proud to rise to speak against the adjournment.

We as legislators, we as elected representatives, need to discuss and debate openly many issues of concern to British Columbians, many that include why this government is disposing of our public health care system and selling private access to MRI testing at public hospitals, why more workers need to die in our forests before this government acts to protect them and why families in forest-dependent communities are still being abandoned by this government. We need to ask what steps this government is taking to reduce child poverty — now, for the third year, higher in B.C. than anywhere in Canada. Why does our province have the largest gap between the rich and the poor and the high-income earners? Why does this government keep trying to mislead the public on Olympic expenditures?

British Columbians were promised a fixed legislative calendar by the Premier. Again, it seems that breaking promises and attacking the most vulnerable are the norm for this government. How can we forget some of the previous quotes and promises of this Premier? "We won't rip up contracts." "We'll value HEU workers and protect and provide for those most vulnerable." "We won't lower the minimum wage or sell or privatize B.C. Rail." "We will increase funding for the Auditor General's office, stop the expansion of gambling, protect education funding, increase training and apprenticeships, and protect B.C. Hydro."

"We'll get the public system back firing on all cylinders so that 'private clinics' become redundant." "We'll carry on the core funding for women's centres." "We will support

the 5-percent tuition cut." "The B.C. Liberal government will lift the veil of cabinet secrecy forever by holding full cabinet meetings at least once a month in public and will have the most open, accountable and democratic government in Canada" — again, while cutting the budget for the non-partisan FOI commissioner and the offices of the Auditor General and the Ombudsman. How ludicrous.

[0010]

This adjournment motion is a continuation of broken promises and flies in the face of an open, accountable and democratic government. I believe there are many issues, both provincial and local, that need immediate addressing by this Liberal government.

During this session my constituents in the Queen Charlottes and Haida Gwaii should have had answers and support around what this government is doing with the coastal forest industry. Were there terms of reference in the latest review of the crisis — as the Premier's special adviser, Ken Dobell, gets into the picture? When will this government come to the aid of rural, coastal communities that have been abandoned by this Liberal reign? When will transitional programs be available? When will a minister finally go to the islands and meet with those affected at Sandspit, Port Clements and the Queen Charlottes?

Issues like the Haida elders and the Skidegate-Haida immersion program deserve a voice in this assembly and in this House, and they deserve support in their fight for travel assistance so that they can continue to preserve their language and culture. The first citizens fund elder transportation program, which currently reviews applications, only supports travel to events within British Columbia, with a 200-kilometre distance as a requirement.

Eleven Haida elders aged 68, 70, 71, 77, 78, 80 and 82 were refused a \$1,000 grant for a cultural exchange trip to Ketchikan, although they received it previously. The total distance to Ketchikan from Haida Gwaii is about 240 kilometres, with 220 to 230 kilometres in Canadian waters. This is the only trip on the west coast these elders can take. No other journey in B.C. will accommodate the preservation of their language. It was refused, and we need to fight for that. We need to preserve and fight for first nations culture and heritage. This is an issue that deserves attention in this House.

We need to know why the Minister of Agriculture is abandoning the Great Bear rain forest — and I mentioned this earlier — especially after the Premier took to the world stage with great fanfare and a photo op to protect the Great Bear. A key make or break part of the deal was a June 12, 2004, memorandum of agreement between this government and the north coast LRMP table in which this government assured the region that there would be no net job loss as a result of the protection of the pristine area.

The memorandum of agreement. The minister was here earlier, and during the UBCM we met with the regional district. We met with some stakeholders. The minister responsible had not even seen the memorandum of agreement. Two brief comments: "This memo-

randum of agreement regarding the implementation of 'no net job loss or better' describes the province's understanding of and commitments to 'no net job loss or better' as agreed to in the north coast land and resource management plan." And: "The province makes the following commitments based on the above understandings: EBM, and in particular the troubleshooting and flexibility provisions, must be implemented in a manner consistent with 'no net job loss or better.'"

Now, because this government is refusing to live up to its commitment, the city of Prince Rupert, Port Edward and the Skeena-Queen Charlotte regional district are threatening to withdraw their support from the agreement, along with many of the EBM stakeholders who indicate that the whole deal is doomed to failure.

In a consultant's report by Knight Piésold on August 4, 2005, it was stated that consequently, on June 12, 2004, the province of B.C. and the north coast LRMP table entered into a memorandum of agreement regarding implementation of "no net job loss or better" and that the province has agreed that the EBM must be implemented in a matter consistent with "no net job loss or better." Proponents of the Great Bear rain forest need to know when the minister and this government intend to take a leadership role and stick to their commitments on "no net job loss."

This is the reason that I'm speaking against adjournment. We need answers; 187 days, 21 hours and three minutes have passed since we last sat in session. That's over half a year gone by during which vital issues important to British Columbians have not been taken up in this chamber.

I believe this government needs to be held accountable for their decision to allow recreational trophy hunting for black bears on Haida Gwaii. A 1995 Council of the Haida Nation resolution called for the end of killing of *taan*, the Haida name for bear.

[0015]

More recently, at the community land planning forum sponsored by the CHN and the government of B.C., participants agreed that the hunt should be stopped. Even in the face of community desire, this government needs to be questioned why they continue to support the killing of this magnificent animal.

Despite claims by the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance that the child poverty rates being reported were relying on old data and that the rates have actually decreased, the latest data shows that British Columbia still had the highest child poverty rate of any province in 2004 for the third year in a row. The 2004 rate was 23.5 percent, or nearly one out of every four children in British Columbia. This needs debate in this House as this government continues to mount its continual, uncaring attack against the most vulnerable.

I recently submitted to this House 127 individual letters and over 500 signatures from my constituents in Prince Rupert. I have not had the opportunity to question where this government is heading for helping the most vulnerable. It is vital that income assistance rates be adequate to ensure participants and recipients who

have no alternatives are able to subsist above the poverty line without enduring undue hardships.

Due to the horrendous fishing season on the north coast, many are in need and took to a Dignity campaign, asking for assistance from this government on four issues. They had rallies. They had letter-writing campaigns. They brought the community together. Madam Speaker, my constituents would have wanted me to bring up these issues, but unfortunately, I cannot. Why? Because this government refuses to sit and refuses to do the work of the House. They refer to it as busywork.

The four issues that my constituents wanted brought out in this House, and this is the only format I can do it.... They want this government to increase income assistance rates by 50 percent and index them. They want this government to allow people on income assistance to earn up to \$500 per month before it is clawed back off their income assistance cheques. They want this government to eliminate the three-week job search waiting period and the two-year consecutive earnings period that penalize those in seasonal coastal jobs. They want the government to raise the minimum wage and abolish the \$6-an-hour training wage. These are vital issues, important to many British Columbians. Unfortunately, these have not had the necessary due diligence by this arrogant and uncaring Liberal government.

The hero residents of Hartley Bay continue in their struggle to ensure that their territory is safe from the contamination of the upwelling of diesel from the sunken *Queen of the North*. There are still major concerns about the long-term environmental effects on their clam and mussel harvesting grounds and the vital seaweed and kelp gathering areas, especially since there have been two earthquakes in the vicinity since the sinking. The draining of the approximately 225,000 remaining litres of fuel continues to be delayed, to the shock and dismay of Gitga'at villagers.

Who is to answer these questions if we are not in session? That is why I am opposing this motion to adjourn.

I still continue to receive numerous requests and suggestions that Hartley Bay should be a designated marine first-responder centre, with appropriate funding, training and equipment and that the new northern vessel should be named the "Queen of Harley Bay." I'm sure that the Minister of Transportation could take the appropriate action and instruct CEO David Hahn to name the new vessel after the heroes of Hartley Bay. After all, the minister did, after the sinking of the *North*, instruct CEO David Hahn to bring forth an immediate plan to restore service to the northern routes. So I'm sure he could instruct David Hahn to name the vessel after the heroes of Hartley Bay.

Hon. Speaker, because we are not sitting in this House, because this Liberal government has decided to take the actions that they have taken on adjournment.... We should have taken action on the killer highway, the highway of tears. We had a symposium. We had the token responses from government. We

now need action on the recommendations from the report. We need to bring to the forefront the issues behind the killings on the highway and commit to long-term resources to ensure that young aboriginal women feel safe, are not treated as second-class citizens and feel that they are supported by those in power.

[0020]

This issue, again, was not brought into this House, not debated in this House, as it is considered busywork by the Premier and his cohorts. The murders of over 30 young aboriginal women along one of our major highways is pushed to the side of a desk and considered busywork.

This government continues to ignore rural B.C., puts lives in jeopardy with the many ambulance stations that have been continually shutting down. Once again, we see an example of rural B.C. being left behind by this government.

The Premier and the Health Minister were well aware of the crisis in the last two years and have simply failed to listen and act. Prince Rupert, the central coast, Massett, the Nass Valley, Sandspit have all been adversely impacted. This is a tragedy waiting to happen. The shortage of ambulance crews that face rural B.C. is a direct result of Liberal cuts. There must be immediate initiatives — which need to be debated, discussed in this House — to overcome the crucial concerns about recruitment, retainment and training in rural areas.

Another issue that I was asked to bring to the House is a key issue in our community, and it's about home support for seniors. Home support is a key program making the health care system sustainable. Economically, it takes the pressure off long-term facilities by helping seniors maintain and improve their health and avoid costly hospital visits.

I had a letter dropped off at my office with a list of 26 seniors who got completely cut off their home care or cut off vital maintenance support. We're following up on that locally, but I find, unfortunately, that Northern Health is not being open and accountable. They seem to be unwilling to share information that is public and needs to be public.

We need government accountability, and we need information. For over six months there have been stall tactics used, and that's unacceptable. A promised briefing note has been taken off the table. At this point in time I haven't seen it.

The public deserves answers from this government. Are the cutback or shaving of home support hours putting local seniors at risk? In Prince Rupert the weekly hours for home support last year were close to 1,100. They've been reduced to 400. Seniors are concerned that more cuts are planned as clients are getting reassessed with a new electronic home care assessment tool used by all case managers.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Northern Health's home support and guidelines strategy of July 2002 states that there is a responsibility

and accountability for each case manager to reduce client reliance on home support.

This House needs to debate, but we are unable to do that with this adjournment motion. We need to debate whether any seniors are being put at risk with these cuts to services or the shaving of hours, as these hours are designed to help them remain independent in a safe and supportive home.

Last June there was a decision to unilaterally cut the northern isolation travel assistance outreach program. The program provides travel assistance funding for physicians and specialists so that they can visit rural and remote communities and provide medical services. According to this government's own policy, rural communities are eligible for up to 24 visits per specialty per year. But an internal report showed that the Liberals were only going to fund 65 percent of the requested visits for the rural communities in the northwest, ignoring the ministry's own policy and the needs of rural communities.

Many doctors from the north spoke out against this attack on rural patients. Here are some of their comments:

"It goes without saying that visiting specialist services are a vital component in providing timely health care services to our remote population. For a significant portion of those we serve, the visiting specialist is the only way to access specialist care, as many are financially disadvantaged, are not covered by third-party plans or have disabilities that prevent them from travelling off island.

"There's no question that withdrawal of services will have a negative impact on health outcomes. For Queen Charlotte Islands residents without a private extended health care plan, to travel for a consultant can cost anywhere from a few hundred dollars to over \$1,000, depending on whether the travel is to Prince Rupert, Terrace, Kitimat, Vancouver. So much for single-tier health care."

[0025]

Just recently there's the sad story of the McKay family, whose mother passed away after a horrendous ordeal with our health care system. The mother was in the hospital. The daughter was from Terrace. She spent 15 days living in the hospital with her mother. There was a bed but no medevac, then a medevac and no bed.

Finally, after 15 days, there was no room on the medevac for the daughter, so the daughter flew to Vancouver. The medevac got diverted. The mother was still in Prince Rupert with the daughter in Vancouver. It's just a horror story — 15 days.

They finally got home, and Mrs. McKay passed away a couple of weeks ago. A doctor's comment on the situation: "We tried for two weeks to get the patient out. Advanced cancer, but this is usual for the north." He feels that: "They were stalling and pushing us around." It's another example of the sickness going on in the north, and it must stop. It needs to be sorted out.

Doctors are frustrated and may leave. Prince Rupert doctors are expected to pay homage to the regional hospital in Prince George. There is a lack of funding. Equipment needs replacing. Orthopedic in-

struments and equipment are breaking down. There needs to be more funding to meet the needs of patients. Beds are empty due to no staff. This is a situation that should not happen in this great province, and that is why I'm opposed to the adjournment motion.

The Premier recently announced at the B.C. Liberal convention: "Health care costs are growing at two to three times the rate of our ability to pay. Our population is rapidly aging. The older we get and the longer we live, the higher our health goes, even with healthy lives." But in the same contradictory breath, he broadcasts: "Within this mandate we will provide even greater tax relief for B.C.'s families in British Columbia."

British Columbians need to get this right. They need to get it straight. According to the Premier, health care costs are growing faster than our ability to pay, but we can afford tax cuts. We all recall that the Premier made an unannounced \$143 million-per-year corporate tax cut after the last election, and this again was just another sleight of hand by the Premier. This time it appears he has given fair warning that he values tax cuts ahead of health care.

Another issue that cannot be brought up because of this adjournment motion is the Shearwater Seabus. It's a critical issue for the residents of the central coast. Due to rising operating costs, the Shearwater Marine group had to discontinue their vital transportation service that has operated for over 20 years, with no government assistance, between the remote coastal communities of Shearwater and Bella Bella.

As we realize, most small island communities in B.C. receive assistance for essential services, as well as reasonable access through a regional airport and hospital, medical and dental services, pharmaceutical service and services from the RCMP. We need to question why the Minister of Transportation refuses to help these communities in need, even though the minister received letters of concern from the Heiltsuk Tribal Council, the Central Coast regional district, the Central Coast Chamber of Commerce, school district 49 and the Shearwater Marine group.

The minister refuses to fund any additional marine passenger routes at this time and indicates that existing government-sponsored services were "established on their individual merits over a long period of time."

Isn't 20 years of providing essential services to remote, isolated communities with no government assistance long enough to establish the individual merits for these coastal communities? This is another reason I'm rising to speak against the motion to adjourn. It's imperative that the Minister of Transportation, as he communicated to me today, analyze the situation and come to the aid of the residents of the central coast.

Daily I get concerns, requests, questions about our integrated marine highway system, B.C. Ferries. I've just got an e-mail tonight, as we're sitting, from Ken and Dona Brewster from Powell River, who just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary.

They were e-mailing to express their concerns and hoped we could raise in this House, in this Assembly,

their concerns about the spiralling costs of their ferry service, with three fuel surcharges in 18 months. "Horrific costs when it's part of our highway," they say. The government needs to look after ferry-dependent communities and increase their fee subsidy to make it less painful for the people of B.C.

[0030]

Recently the Islands Trust put out a press release. They're encouraging the government to amend, make changes to the Coastal Ferry Act. They have major concerns about alternate service providers and major concerns about eliminating the major/non-major route segregation in setting fares. They have major concerns about equitable sharing of price cap increases between users in the province. Basically, in their presentation, in their concerns to the government, they want somebody to look after the public interest.

I've questioned the minister on the public interest. He referred me to the commissioner. I asked the commissioner. He didn't refer me to anybody. He said that his role is to look after the financial sustainability of B.C. Ferries.

We need to amend the Coastal Ferry Act, as we said in this House on April 4. We asked if the Deputy Premier would "commit today to legislating a special committee with coastal MLAs to develop a long-term vision for our marine highway that is accountable to this House and to amend the Coastal Ferry Act to ensure that ferry-dependent communities have a ferry system that is safe, reliable and affordable."

C. Evans: What a good idea. What did she say? Did she say "sure"?

G. Coons: The minister was non-responsive to that, believe it or not.

We still need amendments to the Coastal Ferry Act. We need to look at the cross-subsidization. We need to look at the exemption of our marine highway, the Coastal Ferry Act, from the freedom of information, the Ombudsman and any oversight by the Auditor General. We need to look at section 25 where it indicates that if there is a conflict existing between the act and the Labour Relations Code, the act prevails. We need to treat our workers with respect, and we need to treat them well.

There have been many discussions, many debates in this province and in the world about the environment. Recently we heard the conflicting statements from the Premier and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, showing that the B.C. Liberals don't have a real plan to properly address the offshore drilling issue. The Premier told a group of business leaders in Hong Kong that he expected the moratorium on offshore oil and gas exploration would be lifted in two to three years.

The Energy Minister, meanwhile, has said in recent days that no decision will be made until after the scientific research is done. Perhaps the Premier should check the facts with his minister before he tries to sell his pipedream of offshore oil and gas to the residents in

Hong Kong. He should have informed the people who it most directly affects first, including the people on the north and central coast, before he informs the people of Hong Kong.

Climate change — the most important issue affecting our world today. What do we have? We have the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Energy and Mines advocating for the two dirty-coal power plants in Tumbler Ridge and Princeton.

These coal-fired power plants would emit up to 70 times more nitrogen oxide, 260 times more sulphur dioxide, seven times more matter than the proposed Sumas 2 as well as toxic mercury emissions. There's no basis for describing these proposed plants as clean coal. As proposed, these plants would emit huge amounts of air pollutants and vent hundreds of thousands of tons of greenhouse gases each year.

The decision to commit B.C. to a coal-fired electricity strategy was made without public consultation. British Columbians were never consulted about accepting coal power. B.C. Hydro's own polling shows that three out of four British Columbians oppose coal-fired electricity.

B.C. has an abundance of renewable energy sources. We can be a world leader in producing clean electricity. Wind and microhydro power sources are now commercially viable, as well as solar for small-scale applications. Promising power sources from tides and ocean currents are also under development.

[0035]

We need to discuss in this House progressive initiatives for energy efficiency and renewable energy sources, and that is why I am speaking against the motion to adjourn.

For several years now the Old Massett village council, through the Kluu Laanas Community Development Corporation, has been working toward the development of an important pilot project, the Haida Gwaii carbon forest pilot project, which will allow them to engage with the global community in production and sale of forest-based carbon credits. They firmly believe that the Haida Nation can take a leadership role both in Canada and in the world and demonstrate that solutions to the issue of global climate change can be developed.

The demonstration project, now several years in the making, is aimed at proving the economic viability of the forest ecosystem restoration for the purpose of long-term continuation of CO₂ in a living climate forest in the B.C. coastal rainforest. We need the support of the government. Provided the proponents can obtain the cooperation of the province and the Ministry of Forests and put the appropriate paperwork in place, there are assurances from a number of federal-provincial agencies, private organizations, prospective buyers of the carbon credits....

The estimate for funding is in the range of \$4 million to \$5 million. No funding from the government is required at all. We need the government to move on this project and get their minds off the pipedreams of offshore oil and gas and climate-destroying coal-fired plants.

In conclusion, many British Columbians are appalled and disgusted that we did not have a session. There are so many issues that we could have brought forward, if only the Premier and this government put democracy and accountability first, over their own arrogance and disregard for their constituents, the people of British Columbia.

R. Chouhan: I rise to speak against this motion. Rather than apologizing for not having a fall session, this government is moving this motion to adjourn. It's unbelievable. It's the height of arrogance.

It's important that we continue till Thursday, at least three more days, to deal with this important business that we have in front of us. Mr. Speaker, three days is not a long time. It's the shortest period of time that we're asking to sit more, so we have the opportunity to ask some important questions in the House.

If the House had been called, as it was scheduled, on October 2, we would have had the opportunity to deal with many important issues. There are many, many issues that need to be dealt with: homelessness, mental health, housing, human rights and so on.

We have heard so many times that the economy in B.C. is booming, but for whom? B.C. has the highest poverty rate in Canada. One in three children is living in poverty in B.C.; 51 percent of British Columbians have not benefited from this so-called booming economy. The employment may be up, but the personal savings are down. The economy may be growing, but so is the cost of living.

First-time homebuyers who want to have a house for the first time in their life can't afford to do that. The economy is only good when everyone benefits from it, not just the well-off. Issues such as mental health, homelessness and poverty all go hand in hand. The ill-thought-out government policies have left so many people suffering from mental health without any help. There are shortages of detox beds. There are not many services to help addiction issues.

[0040]

In the last two months I have been touring all over B.C. to meet with people who are dealing with mental health issues. Many of these people have advised me. They have talked about one issue, which is that people do not have access to those beds when they need them. Those who are lucky get to the hospitals to get treatment. They stay there for a week or two weeks or six weeks — whatever time is needed. After that, they are discharged without any proper plans.

This government does not have a follow-up plan. There's no proper discharge plan. If somebody is homeless and ends up in hospital and they're released after the treatment, where would they go? Somebody in Prince George, for example, who comes out of the hospital after treatment would be left on the street. And the vicious circle starts all over again.

In 2003 this government decided to eliminate the position of provincial Mental Health Advocate, which made no sense. It defied all logic. Now what we have in this province is no provincial voice and no one to

speak on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of people who are suffering from mental illness.

One morning during the UBCM convention the Premier woke up and realized the devastation that his government's policies have caused and made a statement to address that issue. That was a hollow statement. As it was reported yesterday in the Vancouver newspaper called *24 Hours*, the reality is that instead of accepting the responsibility, the B.C. Liberal government is launching a public relations campaign to avoid being blamed for rising homelessness and the mentally ill.

This government should be ashamed of what it has done to put more and more people on the street. It's clear that the Premier's main goal is just to hide the problem during the 2010 Olympics. He doesn't care what happens after that. His government doesn't care, and the B.C. Liberals don't care.

They are more concerned with pleasing their corporate friends than finding solutions. We need to have a compassionate approach, not heavy-handedness. We need more disability benefits, not more restrictions for these people.

The issue of housing is a big issue in Burnaby-Edmonds. The majority of the casework that I receive in my office is related to housing — shortage of housing and other housing-related matters. Forty percent of the local residents are renters, a very high number indeed. Those who are able to rent face many hurdles. Many working poor and low-income families are forced to live in places infested with rats and cockroaches — very dirty places. The recent announcement on housing subsidies is no help to these families.

Just a few days ago a family contacted my office. This family is spending 60 percent of its income on rent. They have two sons, one of whom has special needs. That means that the father is unable to work outside the home, as one parent needs to take care of that child. The wife is earning \$30,000 a year, and they pay \$1,500 per month to rent their apartment.

The rental assistance program will not cover low-income families such as this family, whose housing choices are so limited because of their child's special needs. There are hundreds more families in a similar situation.

[0045]

There's another example of poor housing in Burnaby-Edmonds at Hillside Gardens. This is a market rental development that's owned by B.C. Housing. There is a single mother living at Hillside Gardens with her son and two grandsons. Her four-year-old grandson is developmentally delayed and is completely physically dependent and in a wheelchair. Since May 2006 this woman has been unable to work full-time. Her income has dropped considerably, and she may have to apply for income assistance in January.

Currently she does not qualify for this government's new rental assistance program, as she earned more than \$20,000 last year. If she starts receiving income assistance she would also be disqualified. This proves again that the government's policies have failed,

because they are totally disconnected with the real world.

It's important that we are allowed to sit until November 30 so that I could ask the Minister Responsible for Housing questions regarding maintenance issues at Hillside Gardens. Necessary repairs are not done, and the tenants are left without essential repairs. This is outrageous given that this complex is government-owned. I would have expected that B.C. Housing and the provincial government would hold themselves up to the highest standards when it comes to the maintenance of a government asset, but it's not happening. This government does not care.

We need the House to sit to discuss affordable housing, because B.C. has become the least affordable province in Canada. We need to have the House sit to the end of the session to discuss the issue of homelessness. Our community is facing a growing homelessness crisis. In three years under the watch of this Liberal government, homelessness in Burnaby has doubled and is on the rise across the province.

The face of homelessness is also changing. There are more homeless women, children and seniors than ever before. The government policies have fuelled the crisis. Since taking power the B.C. Liberal government cancelled our affordable housing program, creating a housing gap that has left many in our community without a safe and affordable home.

Instead of building more affordable housing, this government introduced rent subsidies. An American study has found that those cities with rent supplements actually cause rents to rise by an average of 16 percent. Who's benefiting from these policies? Not the low-income families, not the poor people, but maybe those who own the property — the landlords.

We need to invest more in homes for the homeless as well as affordable and safe housing for low-income families who are but a single paycheque away from living on the street. The opposition is committed to finding real solutions to this growing problem. Unfortunately, it is not a serious issue for this Liberal government. Instead of calling the House in October to deal with these issues, they called these issues busy-work. Shame.

We also needed the House to sit to deal with the private member's bill that I tabled to re-establish the Human Rights Commission. It is still on the order paper. Since the elimination of the Human Rights Commission, British Columbia does not have an institution responsible for educating and protecting the public interest in the enforcement of human rights law and elimination of discrimination.

[0050]

Under the present human rights legislation in British Columbia, there is no public body with the mandate to provide education and information programs designed to promote an understanding and acceptance of human rights, to conduct and encourage research on matters relevant to the Human Rights Code, to hold hearings and consultations regarding matters relevant to discrimination.

The Liberal caucus is so arrogant as to believe that replacing the Human Rights Commission with a tribunal would do the job. They do not understand that the tribunal is an adjudicative body and cannot be an advocate for human rights. British Columbia is the only province which does not have a human rights commission.

There are many more issues in our community that need to be discussed in this House. I'll discuss one last issue, about the farmworkers. There are many farmworkers in the fields without any protection. Now we have guest workers invited to work in our fields from countries like Mexico and other countries.

We found out a week ago that a couple who came from Mexico to work in the Fraser Valley fields.... They have a child, a Canadian-born child, but the couple have been told that they would be deported. They must leave the country within a month. What happens to that child who is born in Canada? He's a Canadian citizen. They have to leave that child behind? That shows that the policies are not thought through and that people are suffering and affected by those ill-thought-out policies.

We have many people working — working poor — who are not making decent wages. We have the issue of minimum wage. The \$6 minimum wage is a joke. What we have heard from many employers is that there's a shortage of workers, and they are paying more than six or eight bucks. If that is the case, why doesn't this government eliminate the six-bucks policy?

It's about time we wake up and do the right thing and help those who need help: the poor, the working poor, low-income families. If you only concentrate on helping those who already have enough, there won't be very many people in British Columbia who will be able to live here.

In closing, I want to say that I oppose this adjournment motion. I urge everybody to vote against it so that we can sit until Thursday and ask some questions about the government policies.

H. Lali: I rise in the House today to join my colleagues on this side of the House to oppose the adjournment of the House, because we want to bring forward issues on behalf of our constituents and the critic areas that each one of us has. We want to be able to do the work of the people of British Columbia no matter how much the Premier, the House Leader on the government side, the Liberal cabinet and the Liberal caucus might think it's busywork. That busywork, for a lot of constituents who have issues, especially if they're related to health care or the environment, is the difference between life and death in terms of the reaction that MLAs have in this House and how they're going to deal with them.

[0055]

I think it was quite telling when the words from the Liberal House Leader came out when the session was cancelled in early October stating that they have no legislation and that the kind of work the New Democrats want to do is just regular busywork. It's pretty

arrogant. It's a pretty arrogant attitude, and it's really the kind of arrogance with which this Liberal government has been running this province ever since 2001.

It really speaks volumes for the way that the Liberal Party is thinking, that Liberal government. It certainly doesn't fit the values of the people of British Columbia, because the people of British Columbia — my constituents in Yale-Lillooet and constituents from around the province — have a different set of values than the kinds of values that the Premier and the Liberal cabinet and caucus bring to the table.

Really, the attitude of arrogance and uncaring that emanates from members opposite, especially from the Premier, are not the kinds of values that the people of British Columbia have. They want their issues dealt with. Their issues are not busywork. They're legitimate issues that need the ears of government in order to actually deal with a lot of the issues that they have.

I also want to say that the reasons why we on this side of the House, the New Democrats, oppose adjourning the Legislature is that had the Premier and the Liberals lived up to the agreement they brought in, the two separate sessions — one's in the spring, and the other one's in the fall — to try to bring some normalcy to the lives of not only the MLAs who are in this House, but also normalcy in the lives of the people of British Columbia.... They made much fanfare of the fact.

The Premier made much fanfare, and that House Leader on the government side made an even bigger fanfare that they were doing this, that they were going to bring back some normalcy into the Legislature. Yet they're the first ones who are there to break the rules. They didn't live up to their words. It's a height of all kinds of hypocrisy. They're cancelling the Legislature, cancelling the business of the people of British Columbia.

We on this side of the House don't think it is busywork. We're going to raise it, and we want to continue to raise it even though the Liberals think they can just call the House into session whenever they want, end the session whenever they want, bring it back in again. They think it's a toy to be played around with. Well, you can't mess with the lives of the people of British Columbia.

I want to start off by talking about the arrogance of the Liberal government. In my critic area, which includes Citizens' Services and the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, what we've seen is that in the 1990s — and prior to that, when the New Democrats were in opposition from '86 to '91 — we promised that we would bring in the most open freedom-of-information and privacy-protection legislation in the country.

We did that. We brought in an act in 1992 that brought in the Freedom of Information Act. I see that one of the members opposite who got elected the same time as I did, the Minister of Energy....

Hon. R. Neufeld: It was 1991 to 2001.

H. Lali: It was 1991 to 2001. He was in the House at the same time.

Interjection.

H. Lali: If the minister would just hang on. Let me complete. He can do his heckling. That's what he's good at. He's good at heckling. He likes to heckle, and I don't mind that. I'll heckle him back when he's speaking, if he would at least just let me finish what I have to say.

We served in the House for ten years together, and we brought in the Freedom of Information Act. That member was a Social Credit, then he was a Reformer, and now he's a Liberal. I don't know what he's going to be next. If he decides to run again, he might change parties again. Anyway, he made use....

Interjection.

H. Lali: So did the member for Richmond East, and other members who were there from the class of '91. There are a few of us here in this House who were there — first elected in 1991. Those members made use of that Freedom of Information Act, along with thousands of British Columbians, to make sure that they have access to their own information. It's the people's information at the end of the day. They made use of it, and sometimes those members opposite held this government, when we were in government, to task over that.

[0100]

Well, that's all a part of being government in opposition. Governments pass legislation. Opposition holds the government to task. That's part of our democracy.

But, you know, hon. Speaker, even at that time the Liberals said, under the present leader of the Liberal Party: "Oh, it didn't go far enough. It should have been expanded. It should be expanded to other areas, including municipalities and other jurisdictions and to Crowns." They said that when they got to office, they were going to change the whole world. Well, they did change the whole world. They have become the most secretive government in the history of Canada.

They have made, I think, six dozen changes to the act to make sure that they have made it even tighter. A lot of those items that were under the purview of the Freedom of Information Act at one time.... Well, they put them at arm's length. You can't get at it. If you wanted to get access to the Northern Development Initiative Trust, the Southern Interior Development Initiative Trust or the Vancouver Island initiative trust, you can't get at it, because they put it at arm's length. It's not subject to freedom of information. Neither is B.C. Ferries. And the privatization of the administration of the MSP premiums and all that under Maximus — you can't get at that either. It's also outside the purview of the Freedom of Information Act.

I could go on and on about this, but I have a whole lot of lists of questions that I want to pose. If the government had called a session, I'd be asking all these sorts of questions. But that's what this Liberal government has done. They have made the Freedom of Information Act so tight that it's the tightest in all of Can-

ada. You can't get information. Not only that, they made it cost-prohibitive, especially for a lot of folks out there — individuals or organizations who want access. They made it cost-prohibitive.

Not only that, they've extended the turnaround time. Whereas instead of a calendar period.... Then they extended that to a larger calendar period, and then they went to the number of working days. Then they added fees upon fees upon fees to make the people's information even further out of reach than it was even before 1991. That's what this Liberal government has done.

They're secretive. They're doing everything behind closed doors. All sorts of secret deals that are being made — we can't get access to that information, because the government.... I see the Attorney General is nodding in agreement. He knows. He's a former judge. His business as a former judge was to have as much information available so that he could make an informed judgment on issues. He's now sitting as the Attorney General, and he knows that the people out there who are trying to access this information can't make an informed judgment.

The media can't make an informed judgment. They can't get access to the information. The opposition can't get access to the information, and neither can the people out there. They can't make an informed judgment. I know the Attorney General is sitting there, going: "Right on. That's certainly true." I know he's nodding in agreement. He's from the legal profession. He knows all of these things.

It's really kind of hypocritical to see Liberals getting up in the House in the 1990s to say that they're going to open everything up, when they've actually closed the doors shut. If you look at the secret sale of B.C. Rail that was made, any kind of access to information, freedom-of-information requests that are made.... The documents that come out are something like 90 percent blacked out. You can't even find out, in terms of the tendering document, what was really tendered out. What was in that information? You can't get access to it, because they blacked it all out. The people don't have a right to know. This is what the Liberals are saying. That's the kind of arrogance with which this Liberal Party and this Liberal Premier have been executing government for the last almost six years. It's a real shame.

It's a crying shame that the people can't get access to their own information. The Premier himself said that the information in government doesn't belong to the government; it belongs to the people of British Columbia. That's what the Liberal Premier said when he was in opposition as the opposition leader. But as soon as he became Premier, he shut all the doors.

[0105]

You can't get any access. You can't even find the keys to get access to freedom of information because they have made six dozen changes to the act that tighten everything up and put that information on the moon, as far as my constituents are concerned. They can't get access to it.

Had there been a fall session, if the government is interested in going on for the remaining three days, till November 30, I would be posing a whole lot of questions. I know that I'm not going to get shut down for talking about those questions now.

Health care. Health care's a big issue. Any time you want to deal with some issue through the minister.... Go talk to the IHA, the Interior Health Authority. You go talk to the Interior Health Authority, and they said: "I'm sorry, you can't. You got to go to the minister." It's a runaround. They don't want to give that information.

What we would like to ask is.... When the Liberals were in opposition they said they were going to fix everything in health care, any problems. Well, what they've done is they've made it worse. They have made it so much worse that they're actually doing it deliberately so they can bring the private health care system in the back door.

I'll tell you, hon. Speaker, there's nothing wrong with our publicly funded health care system. What's wrong is wrong with the Liberal government, because they don't know how to deliver it. They're deliberately having health care out of the reach of my constituents in small towns where all of those health care facilities.... Some of them were actually closed, and others were actually downgraded to the point that now you have to go to Kelowna or Kamloops.

If you're living in Princeton, you've got to go to Kelowna or Penticton to get health care services. If you're living in Merritt or Logan Lake, you have to go to Kamloops or Kelowna or Abbotsford. The same thing with the people of Lillooet; they now have to go to Kamloops or to Vancouver in order to access some of those simple procedures that used to be available at our local hospitals in rural British Columbia. That's what that Liberal government has done.

They like to say how much money they're putting into health care. The fact of the matter is.... That's what really, if we had all sorts of question periods, I'd be asking the government. I'd be asking the government: if they're thinking they're putting in so much money, why did they close so many hospitals and downgrade so many hospitals? Why did they lay off 1,200 nurses in the last term? That's what they did.

Education is no better. First they made \$140 million in cuts. Then they reinstated them and said: "Look, we've put a record amount of funding into education." But they don't want to talk about the 135 schools that they've shut down — some of them in my constituency — and laid off 2,500 teachers. That's supposed to be their goal of trying to make education the number one.

The same thing has happened with advanced education with the tuition fees that have skyrocketed. The Finance Committee of the Legislature went around the province and heard from so many youths, so many students who said that they wanted to see in this next budget a reflection of their views, which was to put a freeze on tuition fees and actually have a modest decrease to show their commitment to the future of our youth and the education of the youth of British Columbia.

Well, they refused to put it in their report. They refused to put in the legitimate views of students in the report. That's their commitment to education. What they've done is take education in British Columbia, which was actually second after Quebec in all of the provinces, and now it's the second lowest. Only Newfoundland is lower.

We hear members opposite, and I don't know where this comes from.... There's this prosperity that has gone around not only the world but also North America, and it has affected us here in Canada. The economy all across Canada has been doing well. Interest rates were at a historic low. There was a housing boom that was going on, and they were able to actually take the benefit of that and say that the economy is just going on all cylinders, as the Premier likes to say.

What they don't want to talk about is how they have mismanaged the prosperity in this province. We wanted to ask the government these kinds of questions in question period if there was a session this fall. These are the questions we would be raising on behalf of our constituents. Why in the middle of the economic prosperity that is taking place in British Columbia has this government mismanaged that prosperity?

[0110]

There is a record number of homeless people — well over a 120-percent increase in the number of homeless people in the lower mainland. Whereas in communities like Nelson and Merritt and perhaps even Fort St. John, where that member has part of his constituency, and others — all of these small communities where there was no homelessness in 2001.... All of a sudden you've got homeless people in all of these communities, and Victoria is a prime example. This is our capital city, and the economic prosperity should be spread around to all of those folks, especially the have-nots.

This government has failed those people. In Victoria you've got the business community screaming that the government is doing absolutely nothing to help the plight of the homeless people who are, as we speak, with a foot of snow outside the Legislature and on the lower Island.... There are hundreds of people in Victoria who are homeless, who are sleeping in sleeping bags, who don't even have shelters to go to. They're sleeping out on the streets.

I would like members opposite.... That's a question I'd like to ask them. Where is the economic prosperity for these people? Where is that economic prosperity, and what are the Premier and the Liberal government doing to spread that prosperity to the lowest rungs of the economic cycle in this province? No member opposite wants to get up and answer that question.

We've also seen in this province that only five and a half years ago we were actually decreasing that economic gap. The middle class was actually increasing in size during the 1990s. What has happened is that the haves in this province, the people who already have an abundance — whether you're talking about large companies or the people who are making over \$125,000 a year.... You're finding that the rich are getting richer,

and the poor are getting poorer. The middle class is actually shrinking in this province, in the middle of economic prosperity taking place, because of the mismanagement of the prosperity by this Liberal government.

You've got one-quarter of the children in this province living under the poverty line. That's the highest in Canada, and that's what has happened. It went from the second-lowest in Canada to the highest in Canada in just four and a half or five years under this government. If you ask all of those single mothers with children, if you ask those 24 percent or one-quarter of the children in this province how they feel about the economic prosperity....

There was an Ipsos-Reid poll done a few months back. The majority agreed that yes, the economy is doing well. But the majority of them — I think it was 55 percent — also said that they're not feeling the effects of that. The people on the lowest rungs of the economic cycle and the people in the middle-income bracket are not feeling it. They're not feeling it, and that was an independent poll that was done.

This government needs to hang its head in shame over that, but they don't. They don't want to recognize child poverty. Here's how they help the youth in our province. As soon as they got into office, they dropped our minimum wage, which is right there in the middle of the pack in Canada. They dropped it from \$8.15 an hour down to six bucks an hour. That's how they rewarded youth. They raised the tuition fees on the one side, but they took their ability to raise those tuition fees by working, by cutting \$2.15 of their wages per hour. It's a real shame, and one has to wonder why. Why is this happening? It's because the Premier and this Liberal government do not share the values of British Columbians. That's why it's happening.

Hon. Speaker, if you look at the hundreds of first nations on the aboriginal reserves in this province, you'll find that the unemployment rate is still the highest in the country on some reserves. I have 27 first nations bands in my constituency. In some of those bands it's still over 80-percent unemployment. But it still averages around 65 percent to 70 percent on aboriginal reserves.

[0115]

What is this government doing? That's another question I would ask, if there was an extended sitting and we had a question period. What is this government actually doing to make sure that the unemployment rate on reserves is going to be lowered? What is this government actually doing to help the people on aboriginal reserves when it comes to their health, education and social-related problems? Nothing.

It's about the same that they're actually doing for women in this province, as well, because a lot of those lower-income earners, those minimum-wage earners in this province, are women. A lot of ethnic women, immigrants, are the ones who are making the minimum wage when they first come here. Slowly and gradually, as they move up in the cycle, they make better wages, but that's where they all start — youths as well.

When you look at all of the programs that this government cut.... I want to talk about one in particular, and that was the one on women's centres. I know in the Indo-Canadian community there has been this issue of domestic violence that has come up with the murder of two women, and the third woman who is fighting for her life in hospital.

I know the Attorney General singled out the community. Instead of actually talking about the problem and dealing with the problem, he tried to blame the community for that problem. Yet this minister sits in cabinet and has done nothing to convince his cabinet colleagues that funding that was cut, over 50 percent for women's centres, should have been reinstated. For instance, the women's centre in Kamloops should not have had to close because of the funding cuts of this government. The Surrey Women's Centre should have had an increase in funding to be able to deal with those kinds of issues.

Instead of actually talking to his cabinet colleagues to put more money into it so that there could be more educational programs for women — and for men, especially — and to put more funding into the women's centre in Surrey, where a lot of Indo-Canadians live.... I think there are about 85,000 South Asians who live in Surrey, and a lot of those immigrant women could have used the help from the Surrey Women's Centre. But the funding was cut, so instead of actually convincing his colleagues to put more funding into that and other women's centres across the province, the Attorney General chose to single out and blame a single community for the problems that were going on in there. I think he needs to be held accountable for those comments that he made.

I've asked the question, why this Liberal government doesn't care, why this Liberal government refuses to deal with all these problems I've raised. Obviously, it's because the Premier and the Liberal government in this province do not share the same values as average British Columbians.

Then I want to talk about my constituency, specifically about the forest industry. It's the mainstay of the economy of all of those communities in Yale-Lillooet. Whether one is talking about Princeton, or yes, Keremeos.... A lot of those people from Keremeos go to work at the Weyerhaeuser mill in Princeton, or Merritt. Some folks in Logan Lake come to Merritt as well. All throughout the canyon from Hope, Yale, Boston Bar, Lytton all the way up to Lillooet and all of the aboriginal bands in the surrounding areas, they're dependent on the forest industry for work.

This government made much hay about how they were going to change the forest policy in this province, and they made a big fanfare about it four years ago as well. But what they've done is they're destroying the forest industry in this province. If you look at the coast, especially, how they have turned that forest industry upside down.... You've got independent, family-run operations in the lower mainland, on the coast, but also throughout rural British Columbia, on the upper Island and especially up towards the Prince George, Thompson-

Okanagan area, in the Kootenays. Every single one of those independent, family-run operations that at that time supported the government for how they were going to make all these changes and put more wood into their hands are now crying the blues — every single one of them. They're telling us that the government needs to change its ways, or the government itself has to be turfed out in order to make those operations survive.

[0120]

When you look at 65 percent of our forest resources being concentrated in the hands of three major companies, you've got the corporate concentration that has taken place of our forest resource. They've given it away. Family-run operations which have been there for generations — and forestry has been in those families, those independent operators, for generations — can't get access to wood, and a lot of them are going to be forced to shut down and get out of business for good. That's what this Liberal government has done.

They've also sabotaged the small-scale salvage operators. Three years ago a parliamentary committee went around this province to solicit information and came back and made some recommendations to put more wood. The government itself, the Forests Minister of the day, told small-scale operators: "You're going to get more wood, so start ramping up." And they did. They ramped up their spending. They bought more equipment. They bought more machinery. They made investments. They got huge loans.

If you look in my area, in the Merritt TSA, they were getting over, I think, 220,000 cubic metres of wood, give or take 10,000. They were doing fine. They were able to make their mortgage payments. They were employing lots of people. Not only that, but the stumpage rate that they were paying, which was a lot higher than what the majors were paying, was actually putting money into the provincial Forests Ministry's coffers so that money could be spent on health and education.

What this government has done is double-crossed the small-scale operators. That's what they've done. They're now going to actually cut in less than half the amount of timber that is going to go into their hands. Yet some of those small operations have put all the money that they had, or all of the property up for collateral in order to get a loan, to purchase equipment, or go to a long-term lease for equipment. They're having difficulty making payments. A lot of these operators will go bankrupt because this government promised them more wood; this Liberal government asked them to ramp up their spending. They did. They have these huge mortgages that they have to pay, but the government has pulled the rug out from underneath them by actually taking away more than 50 percent of their wood that they had promised.

Transportation. If there was a session, a real session, instead of the mini-session, the two-hour session that the government wanted.... Had there been a real session, we would have been able to talk about questions about transportation. There are all sorts of trans-

portation challenges in my constituency. Pioneer Road 40, up in the Gold Bridge-Gun Lake area — people are saying they haven't seen any money going into that area since I was the Transportation and Highways Minister. Missoula Lake, also known as Summers Creek Road, near Princeton is another one — can't get money for gravelling and ditching. Highway 3: there hasn't been any substantial investment since the 1990s in there. Highway 12 between Lytton and Lillooet, and highways maintenance, also, has gone downhill.

The one final issue I want to talk about is a coal-fired generation plant in Princeton that the Liberals and the Minister of Energy want to push through. The people are dead set against it up there. Just like when the member who is the Minister of Environment....

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, member.

H. Lali: Thank you, hon. Speaker.

D. Thorne: I rise this evening to join my colleagues in opposing the motion to adjourn the Legislature. The reason that I am opposed to this motion is on behalf of my constituents, who are very pleased to see us sitting here in this chamber, where until a few days ago, debate has been....

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

D. Thorne: I was saying that my constituents are very pleased to see us sitting here in this chamber where, until now, debate has been replaced by the undemocratic sound of silence, since this House last adjourned at 4:57 on Thursday, May 18.

[0125]

While campaigning for office the Premier promised voters a fixed legislative calendar, but with no fear of facing the electorate anytime soon, the Premier decided to break that promise. Despite having both an obligation and the power to open the Legislature for a fall sitting, he chose to slam the door shut and declare that there was nothing to talk about in British Columbia.

Nothing to talk about? No issues to discuss? Does the Premier live in a vacuum where time no longer ticks? Perhaps his watch has stopped moving, but our province has not. Since the Legislature last sat in session 187 days, 21 hours and three minutes have passed. That's 4,509 hours or 270,543 minutes. Half a year has gone by during which issues important to British Columbians have not been taken up in a single debate in this parliamentary chamber — until last week.

The Premier is quoted as disdainfully equating the parliamentary process as nothing but busywork. It's time that legislators remind the Premier of his real job responsibilities and demand that he fulfil his promise to run an open and transparent government with a fixed legislative calendar.

Democracy is like the water we British Columbians have long taken for granted. We don't realize how precious it is until it's gone or dirty. The people of our province have shown that they will no longer take de-

mocracy for granted, and they will successfully hold to account all of us politicians who claim to stand up for democratic principle on the eve of an election, yet savage that very essence of democracy after the last votes are counted.

The concerns of my constituents — or should I say the busywork? — that they would like to see me, their elected MLA, working on here in Victoria are not very different than those my colleagues have been discussing all evening. I'll mention just a few.

I happen to represent a riding that is.... I would say the population is an aging one. It's the old part of Coquitlam, and the people in it have lived there for a long time. It's not a very transient riding. I have a lot of people there who are elderly and getting more elderly by the day.

The concerns around health care, as we all know and have been discussing at great length this evening, are perhaps a little more serious in my riding because of my aging population. Certainly, when St. Mary's Hospital closed a few years ago, it had a tremendous impact on Coquitlam.

A lot of people assumed that New Westminster was the most affected by the closure of St. Mary's, but I want to tell this House and you, Mr. Speaker — and you would know — that the St. Mary's closure affected the Coquitlam area, and particularly my riding, tremendously. There were more signs, I would guesstimate, on the lawns of Coquitlam-Maillardville than there were in lots of the parts of New Westminster that I noticed at that time.

We have been severely affected. A lot of our elderly population now have to go to Maple Ridge to have eye problems looked after. The RCH is overcrowded and, as we all know from experiences over the past year here in this very House when we were sitting before, has a lot of problems with the emergency ward.

This is affecting my riding, but nothing has affected my riding more than the cuts to the home support services. I don't know if people in this House are aware. I certainly intend to publicize this as much as I can when I get back to Coquitlam. The average cuts to home support....

In case anyone is not clear on what home support is.... It does get a little confusing now with all the different headings on the different areas of health care and where the money is actually going. Home support services are designed to assist people with chronic and progressive health conditions to remain independent and safe in their homes and communities. It's assessed on a basis of health condition and needs.

[0130]

In 2003, 82 percent of home support clients in British Columbia had pre-tax incomes of less than \$15,000. Of these, 80 percent are 75 or older, and 70 percent are women, most of whom live alone.

I don't think these statistics or that information is all that surprising. I mean, they're simple things. My mother-in-law has some of these services, and some of them have been cut. She's 93 years old, and she is finding the changes to home support services.... I know, on

a personal level, how difficult it has been for her and her friends in the building that she lives in. It's simple things like getting people up, getting them dressed, helping them to bathe and use the toilet, and assisting with medications.

These are not big things, but these are the very things that allow people to remain in their homes. I don't think it's rocket science to extrapolate from this that if we are cutting these services, we are increasing the wait-lists for the people who need to go into more complex kinds of care, which are the ones that cost the most to the population and use up our tax dollars.

The average cut in home support across the province between 2000 and 2005 is 24 percent, and the total number of hours cut.... They have been dropped by 12 percent. Well, I would like it in the record that Coquitlam has suffered much more than most areas of the province. The hours for home support services have been cut in Coquitlam by over 40 percent, the number of clients by over 33 percent. This is in a riding that statistically can be shown to have a growing elderly population.

I think this probably is more than busywork. I don't know. Maybe everybody wouldn't agree with me, but I think this is pretty serious stuff. I would think that a lot of younger people who see their elderly parents suffering because of these cuts would be inclined to agree. I'm sure that MLAs on both sides of the House have been getting many, many complaints about these kinds of things.

There are a couple of comments in here where they talk about.... With the growing population of seniors across the province, the drop in home support services is even steeper. This increased reliance on casual staff and irregular and split-shift scheduling means that clients no longer receive care from the same person on a regular basis. This limits the capacity of workers to get to know their clients, monitor changes in their health status and prevent crises from occurring.

I think this is not only upsetting to the clients. It's upsetting to the workers, and it has to contribute to increased costs in the health care system.

I mean, I just don't see that anyone, on either side of this House, could stand here and tell me or anybody else that this is not increasing costs to the health care system. It has to be. This is a cost-saving measure. We should be doubling the amount of home care support services in this province, and instead we're cutting it.

I'll move on because I was going to be brief, and my throat is very sore. I have mentioned health care. Another thing, an issue in the Tri-Cities — the area that I represent, of course — is the whole affordable housing issue. Coquitlam is one of the areas that has seen the steepest increase in the cost of housing, and it has also seen the biggest rise in rental costs. Most people who cannot afford to pay a hefty rent or a huge mortgage are not able to live in Coquitlam. People's children are leaving, and a lot of people are falling through the cracks.

[0135]

We're seeing a huge increase in the number of homeless. Most of you will have seen the article in the

Vancouver Sun a couple of weeks ago where they talked about the numbers in the past year increasing from 32 to 177 that we know of right now that are homeless on the streets of the Tri-Cities.

Mr. Speaker, I'm sure you would agree with me that this is not acceptable. This is a huge, huge problem. I have all the articles here, you know, talking about the social issues and the steadily increasing number of homeless across the province, particularly in southern British Columbia.

Many of these individuals suffer from problems of physical and mental health, addiction and sexual exploitation as well as the negative social stigma of being without a home. As a result of their homeless state, they may also suffer from severe nutritional problems and are burdened by personal safety concerns. They're very easy prey for illegal and criminal activities.

I could go on and on about homelessness. I think we all know the statistics. I think we all know how unacceptable this is and how many people.... The longer we don't provide affordable housing, subsidized housing — as we have done in the past until the last five years, when we have not been providing any new family housing across British Columbia.... We know that people will fall through the cracks and that more and more people will end up homeless.

So many people are only one or two paycheques away, as the common phrase is, from the street. Certainly, the government is anticipating this problem to be so severe by the time the Olympics come that they're already planning to spend half a million dollars just to hide the homeless for two weeks. That's a lot of money, in 2010 dollars, to be already planning to spend. Obviously, the government is well aware that the homeless numbers will keep on doubling and tripling every year until 2010, because to hide them is going to cost that much money, we're anticipating now.

I think the government is well aware that we have to move on this. God knows we should have been discussing this in a legislative session. This is not busywork. This is real, important stuff, especially to the people who are living on the streets or whose children are possibly living on the streets.

Another area of housing that's a huge issue in my riding and all over the city of Coquitlam and the Tri-Cities is leaky condos — and leaky housing now, even in the Westwood Plateau, which is one of the most expensive housing areas in British Columbia.

We are now finding houses that are leaking, and we have horrible problems all over the place. Community centres, schools.... In fact, a few years ago when I was on city council and they were counting up the buildings and problems across the province, Coquitlam had the highest number of leaky buildings and the biggest leaky problem and mouldy problem in the province per capita. So home inspection is a huge issue, as has been raised in the House in the last couple of days.

I'm just very grateful to have had the opportunity to raise that, to have had a few days of session so that we could raise that issue. It must be seen to. It must be done. Again, it's not really busywork when people are

putting their whole life savings and 25 years of huge mortgage payments into buildings — houses and apartments — that are leaking and mouldy and causing nothing but stress and ruining people's lives, seniors included.

Another huge issue in my riding is the whole Riverview Hospital debate. It was a huge issue all through the ten years that I was on council, and it's still a huge issue because of the uncertainty by the general public about what the future of Riverview is going to be.

[0140]

Will the city and residents of Coquitlam and the residents of my riding, where Riverview rests...? Will they lose this wonderful park-like setting that could provide such a wonderful setting to have transitional housing, second-stage housing or any number of new terms that you could use for the kind of housing that we could use for people who are suffering from mental illness and who could benefit from living in the buildings that already sit at Riverview and just need a little upgrading.

The environmental aspects of Riverview are a huge concern to the people in my riding. The uncertainty has been going on ever since I've been on council, and it grows by the month. So certainly, I would have appreciated the opportunity on behalf of my residents to debate Riverview in this House and bring it up at question period and try and get some answers from the government about what their plans are.

You know, there are the usual problems around the education system in Coquitlam. It's the third-largest school district in British Columbia. I'm meeting tomorrow night with the school board myself — not at the school board meeting but privately, at their request. I know one of the things they want to talk about is the funding for Bill 33. The whole class-size and composition debate is certainly not over in the Coquitlam school district.

The environment continues to be of concern and could certainly have used some discussion. I'm thinking specifically of the stream protection regulations, which we passed when I was on city council. Since then, this government has brought in RAR, riparian areas regulation, which has watered down considerably what Coquitlam had in place. Now the RAR is widely being recommended — I should say, rather than pushed — across the province. So certainly, a good discussion on SPR in question period and in debate would have been a wonderful thing.

My women's centre, the second-oldest women's centre in British Columbia, is suffering daily from the cuts to women's centres. I did bring it up several times last year. I would have so welcomed the opportunity to keep hammering the government on the funding cuts to women's centres.

I will close with probably the most pressing issue in the Tri-Cities, if all of those things aren't enough. Heaven only knows, it's a litany of things that could have been discussed — busywork. Rapid transit transportation is an unbelievable issue in the tri-city area.

We have been expecting rapid transit to come to Coquitlam for about 20 years now. We've been bumped several times. A series of different kinds of things have happened. Most recently, the RAV line to Richmond, now known as the Canada line, bumped Coquitlam once again.

I can only say that every time this happens — every time there's another delay, another stall to rapid transit — the costs have gone up, as we all know. The costs have probably tripled, quadrupled in the last few years alone. Now we can't get rapid transit. It's stalled again because now there isn't enough money. The costs have gone up so much because of the stalls that have happened before now.

It's pretty much a catch-22 situation. I can't see any resolve to it for the residents of Coquitlam and my riding without the provincial government at least getting into a debate, a discussion around funding — coming up with funding, finding some way to fund the rapid transit. If we leave it for another four or five years, it's going to be that much more expensive and out of reach financially. This is a no-win situation.

[0145]

We could have spent six months, probably, just talking about rapid transit, freeway expansion, the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge and those kinds of issues, which will affect my riding probably as much as or more than any other riding. The north end of the Port Mann Bridge feeds into my riding, and the freeway runs right through the middle of it, so I would've really liked to have had a chance to discuss that.

It's for those reasons, the ones that I have mentioned, that I did take a little longer than I meant. But it's only when I started writing them down that I began to realize what we really have missed by not having a legislative session. For that reason, I oppose the motion. Thank you for letting me speak.

C. Evans: For the benefit of those people in the province who might still be awake, I'll just give a little bit of a prologue about what's happening here.

The members of the government and the opposition were called by the Speaker, who sent us a letter calling us to the Legislature, to appoint a children's commissioner about three days ago. It was assumed that that would take about an hour and that would be the only session that would happen this year. There would be no fall sitting.

That made the opposition members somewhat grumpy. We kind of thought that we should earn our wages. What a weird thing it is to pay people wages and close the factory. "You actually don't have to come to work. We want to pay you to stay at home because we don't want you to do the job that the people are paying you for."

That seemed sort of silly to us, so we have been, for three days now, attempting to make the case that we would like to do the job that the people on the other side of the cameras expect. I hope that's perfectly clear to those of you at home.

What is happening now is that it is quarter to two in the morning, and the opposition is attempting to

force the government to govern in the parliament that the people own, doing our job. If I sound a little bit grumpy it's because I love this work. I worked hard to get this job. I believe in this building and the democratic principles that my parents taught me were close to godliness. Now I'm working in a system that says: "You don't count. The work doesn't matter. The building won't function, and you should go home." Makes me a little bit grumpy at quarter to two, but now I'm going to take a deep breath.

When we're done here today we're going to go home for Christmas. In the spirit of Christmas — that Christian idea of giving, human kindness — I'd like to give the government a present. I'd like to actually try to help the government save themselves from themselves.

I think what the government and the present Premier either don't know or never learned or need to have taught to them is what many leaders have learned in the past, which is that a government — any government, be it my party, your party or any of the historical parties in the past — needs a functioning opposition in order to be intelligent and to save themselves from pride, laziness, sloth, greed, stupidity and all of those things that happen when a king, a government, a shah, a dictator, anybody, sits up there. Without an opposition, you slide into stupidity.

If you have an intelligent opposition.... Tommy Douglas wrote this down. They asked him: "How did you manage to be Premier of Saskatchewan for" — what? — "eight terms?" And he said: "I tried to keep the opposition intelligent in order that my government would be intelligent enough to actually do the work the people sent us here to do."

Hon. members will remember that when Tommy Douglas was the Premier of Saskatchewan and the Prime Minister of Canada would call a first ministers meeting, Premiers would come from all of the provinces, and Saskatchewan sent the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. Why was that? They said: "Tommy, what are you doing here? Why'd you bring the other guy for?" Tommy said: "I had to bring him to keep him smart, to keep my government from sliding into stupidity and then oblivion and disappearing."

[0150]

There are some excellent examples of this — aren't there? — right here in our own province. We had this phenomenon in 2001 where the province elected one party to sit on both sides, front and back rows, all the way around — two people over here. There wasn't even an official opposition. It was two people. What happened? Because there wasn't an intelligent opposition, the government got really stupid really fast. We've had empirical evidence.

They walked in here in 2001, and what did they do? They said: "We're having a referendum. Can't have any treaties." And the people said: "That's really stupid." The next thing they did is they said: "Let's fire the children's commissioner. We don't need a children's commissioner running around here, looking into the tragedies of children." They can't be blamed for that. It wasn't their fault. They didn't have an opposition.

Here's my empirical evidence. In 2005, 33 people got elected, and now there's an opposition, and the opposition is pretty smart. They come into the Legislature and say: "Hey, you know what, you guys? You got it wrong on treaties." Whoa. They turn around, and they're best friends of first nations now. Now we've got an opposition, and we sit in here, and the hon. member who sits behind me just hammers on the children's commissioner. What happens? Whoa. The government gets smart and hires a children's commissioner. I'm not talking theory or myth; I'm talking empirical evidence. You guys need us to be intelligent.

There are lots of casualties, the people who missed this lesson. Hon. members opposite will remember that my dear friend and colleague and brother got up here one time and said the government could do anything it wanted, and that government went down. There's a long history here of Premiers and governments who thought they could do anything they want.

We can't name the people that work in the building at the present moment, but we'll all remember W.A.C. Bennett. He thought he could govern forever. What happened? He got a little bit arrogant. He got a little bit over there, where he thought: "I can do anything I want." Down he goes. And on it goes — Dave Barrett, Bill Bennett Jr., Bill Vander Zalm, Glen Clark. You guys need the Legislature to sit and to ask intelligent questions so you don't become guilty of the sin of arrogance and slide into the stupidity that will bring you down.

Hon. Speaker, I always believed.... When Mike Harcourt was the Premier — Glen Clark, Ujjal Dosanjh — whether I was a rural member, an MLA or a cabinet minister, I thought we needed a fall session. I went to every single one of those Premiers and said: "You know what? We need a fall session. This business that we inherited from W.A.C. Bennett of sitting all summer and legislation by exhaustion is the dumbest way to run a government it could be because it makes the opposition stupid."

How can they function if they're there for 24 hours, their kids are out of schools, they're still sitting there and it's July, and it's hot as could be? Everybody in town is a tourist except the people in here, as we sit all summer long.

"Please, Mr. Premier," I said to my team, "can we have a fall session — sit here for a reasonable amount of time? Then, when the kids get out of school, we'll go home too. Maybe those of us who live in the country will be able to make hay." For ten years I had to buy hay from somebody else because I was sitting down here when it was time to make hay.

I could never convince my Premiers. They said: "Well, if it was good enough for W.A.C. Bennett and good enough for Bill Bennett Jr., it's good enough for us." Well, that's a good idea: get your lessons from the failed governments of the past.

At any rate, in 2001 we get a new government and the gentleman over there, the Premier, says: "You know what? We're going to have a fixed session." I thought, hey, that guy is not so bad. He's got a good idea. There'll be a session in the spring, and it'll run four

months. We'll debate the budget estimates, and we'll do a bunch of bills, and then whatever's left over, we'll go home for the summer and we'll come back in the fall.

Really good for rural members, eh? It gives us the travel opportunity to come back. It allows us to get our summer chores done. You get your wood in, you get your hay made, you see your family, and you come back in the fall and do the business of the Legislature.

I thought the Liberals were a little enlightened on this. I even went around and said: "You know what? That Premier kind of has a bad rap, but he's got a good idea on that fall session." And it worked, didn't it? It worked great, as long as there was no official opposition and there were two very short women on this side. That was great. We sat in the spring four months and sat in the fall two months.

[0155]

Then, just like every ridiculous Premier in the past, when a real opposition shows up — and there are 33 people, and they actually have a little bit of staff; they do a little bit of research, they have some ideas, they've got some questions, and they want to talk about what's happening — whoa, we don't need a fall session anymore. Four months is good enough for us because we're scared.

Hon. Speaker, I withdraw that remark "scared." That's not very kind, parliamentary.

It's not so much that they're scared as that they weren't smart. They didn't understand that the function of a parliament is to make a government strong. They thought, just like all those empty-headed Premiers before him, that it was a bad idea when people over here ask hard questions about all the issues that people have been raising here all night long until five minutes to two in the morning. They made the stupid mistake of forgetting that they are smart because we exist.

What did they do? They said: "We're not going to have a fall session. We're going to pay the MLAs to not go to work." All of those of you at home, wouldn't that be cool? Send you a cheque and say: "Oh, don't bother coming to work, Fred or Mary. We'll pay you to stay at home." They said we're not going to have a fall session. Then in a manner that was....

Is "duplicitous" a parliamentary word?

Interjection.

C. Evans: No, it's not?

In a matter that might have misled some people, they said: "Well, the New Democrats never had a fall session, so we don't have to." The folks who work up above us, the press people, swallowed it. My goodness. What they should have said was that when the New Democrats governed, they were not smart enough to have a fall session, so they had an average of 65 days of work in this room...

Hon. R. Neufeld: Day and night.

C. Evans: ...day and night, often...

An Hon. Member: Over a hundred.

C. Evans: ...over a hundred sometimes. What we're doing by cancelling the fall session, since we only had four months in the spring, is that we're going to cut that down to 45. We're going to get paid to do two-thirds of the work that happened under Socreds or New Democrats or every government that ever worked here before. We don't have to go to work to get paid.

Almost everybody knows I'm an immigrant. I'm an immigrant from a country that had a fight with a colonial government. They wouldn't let any of our team sit in their parliament, so we threw their tea in the water. We said that what we were having that fight over was no taxation without representation.

Well, what is happening in British Columbia right now? The government is taxing the people, and the representatives don't get to go to work. That's taxation without representation. I think all of you at home should only send in two-thirds of your taxes because they're only working here two-thirds of the time that anybody else did in history.

Then they annoyed almost everybody I know who believes in this job by saying: "We're not calling the Legislature because it's busywork." I think you've heard, hon. Speaker, speeches all night long, people talking about issues that are dear to them. They may not be important to the government. That doesn't matter. I don't argue that the issues that people on this side raise are more valid than the issues that the other folks care about. It's just that in a democracy everybody's issue is real.

Hon. Speaker, I don't know about you. I'm guessing that our parents told us that's what the wars were for — so that everybody's issue would be real, so that nobody could sit in the big chair and say what matters and doesn't matter. It doesn't matter to me if you guys agree with us.

[0200]

It is not busywork when people who are elected to work here wish to raise issues. I think it's our job. I think it is to the enlightenment, edification and probably survival of the government if we do that job. And I think all those folks at home sent us here and told their kids to vote: "Get out, kids, and when you're old enough, go vote, because it matters."

I think the only people in the whole province who think it's busywork and irrelevant are the people who are afraid of it, who sit over there and who didn't learn the lessons of all the arrogant governments in the past that went down because they didn't hear.

In my constituency, in Nakusp and New Denver and Nelson and Salmo and Winlaw, there are rural ambulance services, and they don't work very well anymore. I'm not standing here blaming some guy. I'm saying the people think we could fix it with discourse, dialogue, questions. That's what they think I'm supposed to do here.

Hon. Speaker, it's almost coming on Christmas and two food banks in my town, Nelson, haven't got the money to function. I'm not blaming anybody. You see

me pointing any fingers? I'm just saying the people that sent me here thought I would raise the question: how do we support the food banks as Christmas comes on? They think that's my job. And I think that if I do it, the ministers opposite will learn of the issue and be able to solve it and look smart.

Last year in this Leg. in the spring I raised the issue of Darren Gregory, who is a paramedic. In 2002 the government changed the Workers Compensation Act, and they took out stress for police, firemen and paramedics — stress. Working in a violent industry with injured people every day of your life and maybe fire and.... Stress is no longer a compensable problem.

We got a dialogue because the Legislature sat and I could ask questions, so the minister started talking to me. Because we could ask questions, we could meet in his office, meet in the hall. I could have a dialogue with his staff. That's how the government works. Sometimes I get the press. That's how the government works.

I said to Darren Gregory: "I didn't fix it, but I'm coming back in the fall. Don't give up, man. This is the dialogue that democracy offers to fix it. Not just for you, Darren, but for every policeman and paramedic." Darren needs the dialogue, and the government needs the dialogue so that on the next voting day they don't look stupid.

An institution where I live called the Columbia Basin Trust wrote a report on climate change, the first regional report that I've ever seen on climate change and what's going to happen in that region and what it means to the glaciers. I live in a place called the Slocan Valley. I've lived there 35 years. It's a small valley; it's where I used to log. It said in there that 47 percent of the ice in my valley is gone already in the last 15 years.

Hon. Speaker, I've been working here that long. That means while we've been in this building, half of the ice is gone before we get to talk about it. My job is to ask questions. I accept failure. I accept 15 years of failure. I didn't get the questions in there before the ice started melting, but to not come to work now — to not ask the questions, start the dialogue, create the fix — makes me unable to do my job and makes the government stupid.

I want to talk just for a second about Sandon. Sandon is a ghost town. We mined silver there. In fact, we mined so much silver in the Kootenays that the value of the mineral ore exceeded the California gold rush, the Cariboo gold rush and the Yukon gold rush combined. The heart of that was Sandon.

There is a mining company trying to restart the silver mine in Sandon, and there are about a dozen residents who live there who want to have power. I ought to be able to deliver.

We're really lucky. We live in a province where we own the electric company. We own the dams. We own the power lines. We own B.C. Hydro, and we're proud. I ought to be able to ask questions in here to say: "Could we please hook up the mine to our power company?"

[0205]

I don't get to ask, which means I can't help to create the employment. I can't help to put a living, growing,

strong population back in Sandon because I don't get to go to work, and it makes the government stupid.

Three years from now when I'm running for office, I'm going to stand up and say: "I tried to do my job, but they wouldn't even call the Legislature." It isn't going to look bad for me, hon. Speaker; it's going to look bad for the government. I'm trying to save you guys from yourselves.

In my critic role, I've got certain jobs I've got to do. I'm up there in Williams Lake, and I'm talking to these ranchers. What's happened to the ranchers? The CN Rail line.... They're raising cows. They're pretty proud of it. They've got the cows out there on the pasture, and they're making a living. CN comes along and wipes out the cows. Then in an arrogance that I find almost impossible to believe, they go dig a hole and hide them.

I'd like to ask questions about what kind of contract we made with CN that said they don't have to maintain the fences anymore. I would like to ask a question like: how come they don't even have to tell the ranchers when they kill their cows anymore? I'd like to ask: how come they don't have to pay the ranchers when their cows die?

But I don't get to, do I? I don't get to, because somebody here's going to shut this Legislature down, and there won't be any questions tomorrow. Sorry, folks in Williams Lake. I did the best I could. I came to work. I spent 12 hours driving to Vancouver, 17 hours to get here, and the government decided to send us home.

It's the same in every commodity I see. I go and talk to the president of the Fruit Growers, and I go, like: "How's it going?" He's going: "Well, it's not going very well. We talked to the minister." I said: "What did the minister say?" He said: "The minister told us to grow grapes."

You know what? The fruit industry is older than the province of B.C. There was a ministry of agriculture before there was a government in British Columbia, and there was a fruit industry before there was a ministry. Ever single minister for a hundred years that worked over there was supposed to go and actually engage and assist the fruit industry. Now we've got a minister who goes and says: "Whoa. Why don't you grow grapes?"

I've got to ask questions, hon. Speaker, about how come we don't even have enough budget in the Ministry of Agriculture anymore to manage the crop insurance program. How come we delegated to the federal government and put in Winnipeg the people that answer the letters. If farmers in the Peace write in, as the member knows, where do they go? They go to Winnipeg, because we can't even manage the crop insurance program.

Hon. Speaker, I would like to raise questions about the meat regulations. I'm actually trying to make it work. I'm trying to make it work as well as I can for those people who are in the business of ranching and who want to sell meat across borders — provincial and even national borders — and also for the little farmer who wants to sell it to their neighbour. I don't think

that's done by screaming at the minister. I think it's done by asking questions and having a dialogue and working it through. But they're going to send me home. I live — what? — 800 or 1,000 miles from the Minister of Agriculture. If we empty the building that the people own — where he goes to work and I go to work — how's that dialogue going to happen?

So what's going to happen? The minister is, of course, going to impose some fairly stupid regulations. That's what happens, not because he's stupid. He's a fine, wonderful, intelligent person. It's what happens when ministers do jobs where there's no ability to question what they're doing. When they can't hear the loopholes because the opposition doesn't do its job, you get stupid jobs. Then what happens? It's not me that has to answer for it. It's the minister. I am trying to save the minister from himself by doing my job in the Legislature as opposition.

I guess I want to close with Formosa Nursery, even though we talked about it before. I live 400 miles from the lower mainland. I don't know a whole lot about a lot of the issues that people here raise. But I've spent a lot of time there in the last month, and I have come to realize that the issue that I have been raising.... The member from Maple Ridge has been raising it. Formosa Nursery, where TransLink appears poised to pave a blueberry farm. It's second generation, a third generation being raised there.

[0210]

It's important to raise not just because of the blueberry farm and the business and the money that will be lost, and the food. It's important to raise because what I've come to learn is that it's the tip of the iceberg. Because of the growth in population and all the transportation issues and.... What do they call that road that's going to come from the docks? What is it — south perimeter?

Some Hon. Members: South Fraser perimeter road.

C. Evans: Hon. Speaker, agricultural land appears to be the development land bank for TransLink or the province to have the lowest-cost transportation alternative. The agricultural land reserve was built in 1973. It's been defended by New Democrats and Socreds and, hitherto, by Liberals. And it feels to me like something is happening right now that might make it indefensible in future.

It would appear that at the Formosa farm they've moved the road into the farm 130 feet, away from land that we already own. It's free. We don't have to pay for it. It's free. The Crown owns it — the Crown that's represented by those people over there. They already own the road but they've moved it into the middle of the farm, and you have to ask yourself why. But then while I'm busy trying to answer the question why, it turns out that with the south perimeter road, they're about to do the same thing.

They already own a right-of-way that goes all through Delta and Surrey. Instead of using the right-of-way that they own and widening it so that they can run trucks out there, they are going to put a brand-new

road through the middle of the farmland. What's that going to do? People say it may be that it's going to pave 20 percent of the cranberries in the lower mainland. I don't know if that's true, but I do know one thing, and that is: when you put that road through the middle of the farmland, it will make it almost indefensible for the people to make a living farming there. And then it's going to be put on the market.

For 35 years people have been doing stupid things with the agricultural land reserve. I'm one of them. Every single minister who's ever worked here gets in a jackpot with the agricultural land, because it's hard. But every single one of them, in the past...

Spetifore lands, Barnston Island, Six Mile Ranch. They were farmers who were asking to get out. It was families struggling with that question of the value of the land as farmland and the value of the land as developable land and wanting to cash in.

For the very first time the issue isn't a farmer wanting to get out. It's a farmer wanting to farm and a government that appears to be saying: "We're not paying any attention. We no longer defend farming and food production and the business of being in farming." I've never seen that happen before, and when I asked myself why a strong and powerful government would want to behave like an impotent government, I look over and see this south perimeter road thing on the horizon, and it occurs to me that maybe the government just wants to see if they can get away with it.

The hon. member opposite, from Abbotsford, correctly accused me of conflict of interest. We had a struggle over Six Mile Ranch, and it got solved. Then we had to appoint a commissioner, and the commissioner decided to redefine the provincial interest, and out of that dumb experience, we made a better law.

That's the value of this place. That could never have happened if he didn't get to work in here 65 days a year, minimum. He had to be able to sit in the opposition in order to be able to straighten me out.

I didn't like it at all. It made me feel terrible, but I totally respect the guy because he did his job in the building the people built for this kind of work. And if I can't do it for Ting Wu and Risa Lin, how am I going to do it with the south perimeter road? And if I can't do it with the south perimeter road, how am I going to do it when that kind of development gets to Kelowna? And if I can't do it in Kelowna, how am I going to help the people in Creston, because we're not going to work?

Hon. Speaker, I very much appreciate you sitting there at 2:14 in the morning, and I appreciate that there are members on both sides here at 2:14 in the morning. And I appreciate it that there are people actually watching at 2:14 in the morning. However, I am totally shamed and ashamed to be taking wages for the work I thought I believed in, and I do, and going home instead. I will therefore vote against this motion and try and keep this House here to do the work that we're paid for.

[0215]

C. Puchmayr: For those of you at home: yes, it is 2:15. This is not a rerun. It's an honour to rise here to

speak against the motion to adjourn the debate. I, too, speak on the same concerns that my colleagues have had here with respect to the promised legislative session — the agreement, the law that was made to establish the legislative session, and then suddenly, it's gone.

This government can't have it both ways. You can't have an agreement to have a legislative session and then deny that right to the people of British Columbia. It's their Legislature.

I remember when I first came in here into this very grand chamber of democracy in British Columbia. I remember listening to the education session on what an honourable speaker is and what that means, about what an honourable member is and what that means to us. It means that an honourable member is one that is truthful. Someone can lose that distinction of an honourable member by not being truthful in this Legislature, even ending up in a jail that apparently they have downstairs somewhere. I haven't found that yet, thank God.

Here we have a government that has agreed with the opposition to go into a process where there will be a session as opposed to doing it as in the old days, where the debate would go on for hours and hours, days and days, into the wee hours of the morning. They agreed there would be some civility, and that they would bring this thing forward.

When you look at that type of an agreement, it's a contract. It's really a contract on procedure. It should be held up extremely high. We are the lawmakers of provincial legislation, and those contracts should be upheld with a lot of respect because those laws are made in this very chamber by us.

If the government were to enact something like this... If this happened in a civil context, let's say, where two people had an agreement and one breached the agreement, it would be called a breach of contract — in labour law it's called an estoppel. The explanation from arbitrators or law professors is that an estoppel is when you allow somebody up the tree and out on the branch, and then you saw off the branch. You can't do that. You're estopped. You can no longer do that. You've broken a rule. You've broken a contract.

This government has done exactly that. They have broken a contract not only with this Legislature, with the very lawmakers of British Columbia, they've broken that contract with the citizens of British Columbia as well — with the citizens in my community, with the citizens that are having issues in their community, with the citizens that are having issues in the forest industry with the fatalities, with the citizens that are having issues with the travesty at the Sullivan mine.

These people, these citizens — our constituents — all expected us to have an ability to come here to this grand historic chamber and bring those issues. They knew by going on the Internet that there was a set calendar. It's still there today. You go on the Internet, and the set calendar is still there today.

Anywhere on this globe that has an Internet, you can click onto leg.bc.ca, and you can see that we should

have been sitting for quite some time. But we were called back for one issue, when there are so many issues that are affecting our communities and our society today.

It's insulting to me. It is insulting that we can have an agreement to sit, agreement to deal with the people's business, and to have the government just say.... What's that term? Busywork. That's insulting to me because our work is always busy, whether we're in the Legislature here or in our communities.

Many of us work seven days a week. But we still make sure that when the Legislature is sitting, we're here, as well, and then we're going back into our communities. Certainly, in my line, in my community, there are very few days when I don't have something that I have to engage in as a member representing the people of New Westminster.

[0220]

I'm going to start off by just speaking a little bit about how issues, which I have not been able to address because there hasn't been a session, are affecting my community. Having two or three question periods really.... There are so many things that have been built up, been backlogged, that we need to address. You know, an hour and a half to address issues that we should have been addressing for half a year is just not on. It just isn't going to do justice to the serious issues in our communities.

In my community, as in many communities, homelessness is in such a crisis state, which I have never seen before. I remember in the early '80s being in California and seeing homeless people and thinking that, wow, this is unreal. Such a rich country, with people that are homeless standing there with signs going: "I'll work for food." I was so proud to be a Canadian, that we didn't have this problem in our country. Here it is, not even a quarter of a century later, and it's worse than what I saw when I was in California. It is absolutely out of control.

It is to such a degree that it is costing society more money than dealing with the problem. Statistics show that for every dollar spent on helping the homeless or on rehabilitation for people with drug issues or on dealing with people with mental illness and putting them in the proper care, there's a \$7 saving.

Now economists in the United States are actually once in a while coming into Canada. These are people that you wouldn't expect to hear these kinds of things from, but they're talking about that when you've got a bottom-line mentality, it's all about what is value for money.

They're coming here, and they're saying: "Look, Canada, you need to spend money on the homeless issue because it will actually save you money — fewer ambulance rollouts, fire rollouts, emergency rollouts. You will have fewer people in the hospitals. If you can prevent someone with a mental illness from getting HIV or hepatitis C, it's a saving of millions of dollars for that one person."

Just think, if you just invested that into that person to make sure that our people with mental challenges are being cared for, not in institutions where they're

locked in cages.... I think we went the right way to get people into the community, but you can't put them in the community and then take them away from their shelter and their homes and have them fend for themselves and stop keeping track of them. The statistics show that about 80 percent of the people out there that are homeless do have some form of mental malady. If they don't, it won't take long before they will have one.

The issues in my community are extremely serious. Another mill closure. That mill has been in my community for many years and has been modernized many times over. As a matter of fact, I worked there when I was 17 years old, one of the first decent-paying jobs that I had. This mill is closing, and to me it is closing directly because of the way that we deal with forest practices in this province today.

We've gone from a Forest Practices Code to a forestry revitalization agreement, which is merely a carbon copy of the Department of Commerce paper telling this government on the other side in 2003 how to engage in free trade with the United States in forestry. There were some tough decisions that were made in order to engage and in order to show our trading partner across the border, our biggest trading partner, that we can engage in cross-border commerce on forestry.

Well, we saw what happened. After this government wrote the document in 2003 and passed it into legislation, we no longer had a component where a tree farm licence was linked to value-added. That has disappeared. That is now gone.

When a mill closes, such as the one in our city, in our community.... I received a phone call from the CEO or the vice-president of the forestry company saying that they were going to be doing a press conference in about a half an hour and that the mill was closing. "Gee, there's not much we can do. You know, it is an old mill, and we're opening another one somewhere else with all brand-new employees or some employees that may be called back."

[0225]

Again, it has a huge impact, whereas before, under the Forest Practices Code, we could say to that tree farm licence holder or that forestry company: "Well, if you're going to close that mill in New Westminster, then you're not going to be able to get those trees to open that other mill."

It was a pretty fair equation because then the bean counters would do their calculations, and they would say: "Yeah, I guess we should keep that mill. It is a profitable mill. It is making money. It is making millions of dollars a year, and it is employing a lot of people. We'll keep it open because if we don't, we're going to lose our ability to cut the trees that we provide to that mill." That was a pretty fair component.

Pulp mills. We're seeing pulp mills now that are closing. I anticipate — I suspect — that within the next decade we probably won't see pulp mills in this province because there are pulp mills in other areas that can take our fibre, our chips and our logs, and grind them into pulp and not put any value back into the commu-

nity because the forestry revitalization agreement says that they can do that.

Where did we get with the Department of Commerce and with the United States on this file — the softwood lumber crisis? They just decided after awhile that: "Hey, we've got everything now." We still don't think they're treating it fairly, and we took them to every court possible and won every dispute. The province was out billions of dollars of revenue and tens, if not hundreds, of millions of dollars in legal costs because they merely balked at an agreement they had with us.

The revitalization agreement is going to impact my community severely. Industrial land has a ten-time multiplier. Commercial land has a five-time multiplier, and I'm talking about five times to residential. Commercial is ten times to residential. So what happens when you lose that land? Let's say that land turns into residential. Well, you have lost 90 percent of that tax base. That has to be passed on now to the rest of the citizens in my community and in many other communities that are going to be paying the tax burden of this legislation that came in, which is now causing mill closures. They are falling like dominoes all over this province. Many jobs are being lost over it.

We can't come in here and discuss it because we're not given the ability to have a full debate on these issues or to address the minister across in question period on these issues. That is a real concern to me.

Some of the other issues that are pending, which should be alive through this session, are with respect to forestry deaths. We received a document in August 2005, which we brought up in the House. It was a memorandum, a legal draft, of the B.C. Forestry Safety Council. It stated very clearly that there were ambiguities and inconsistency with legislation that potentially created difficulties in determining safety responsibility and accountability. It went on to say that the legislation, which applies to all sectors of the industry, does not fit the current realities in the forest industry.

We brought that up in the House. We brought that up in meetings with the then Labour Minister. No action was taken. We were able to push to get a forestry coroner that strictly deals with forestry issues. We now have a forestry coroner. I would have liked to see more forestry files go to a full inquest by now.

[R. Hawes in the chair.]

We're certainly trying to get to see that there are more logging truck driver fatalities dealt with, because there has been a deregulation of the standards of logging roads that can no longer be enforced by WorkSafe B.C.

[0230]

I personally believe that logging truck drivers are at risk because of this reckless deregulation. I would like to see the coroner deal with this so that we can have a full inquest and analyze logging truck fatalities to see if the inquiry will again come up with recommendations, such as what the coroner did in the Ted Gramlich case,

which was the faller's inquest. The verdict at the coroner's inquest was quite scathing of government actions.

As a matter of fact, one of the interesting components even directs the government to again take guidelines out of the safety regulations, which were turned from prescriptive regulations. This government loves to deregulate, but really when they deregulate, all they're doing.... They're not deregulating; they're re-regulating. They deregulate so that the employer doesn't have a liability or responsibility.

What it does is regulate hazards to the workers in the field. The inquest found that very clearly. The inquest stated that guidelines don't work. Guidelines are not the way to go. There needs to be prescriptive regulations so that the employers know, so that the workers know and so that the subcontractors know exactly who is responsible for the health and safety of those workers in the field.

As we have seen the changes in the forest industry, we have seen companies go.... Again, because of interesting rewriting of components of WorkSafe B.C.'s regulations, we've seen companies that, because they have a chainsaw, can now be incorporated. We've seen large forestry companies say: "I don't want fallers anymore. I don't want loggers anymore. I'm going to contract that out. Here you go. Buy your chainsaw, and you are now a company. Call yourself whatever you want. If you're good and you don't make waves, I'll hire you to fall my trees."

The inquest was very clear. As a matter of fact, the gentleman that tried to save Ted Gramlich's life actually laid his body underneath him to keep him warm and secure while he was dying and waited for hours for a medevac to get out of there. They asked him: "Are you taking risks because you should be felling trees and you want to get that contract back?" And he said: "Ted didn't, and I don't, but some of the younger guys do."

What that means is that those new employees, who used to be employees of the forestry company and are now subcontractors, need to put food on the table. They need to feed their kids. They need to pay their mortgages. Some of them are taking chances. They're going out in the bush, and they're felling trees when there's fog. They're felling trees in a way that there's minimal damage, which means you can't do a proper cut as is required to do.

From the inquest it seems some of the best loggers, when it comes to quality control, were the ones that weren't cutting their stumps properly. And in the case of Ted Gramlich, who died on Blackjack Ridge, he was on an 80-percent grade — an incredible grade — where he was dropping trees that had to be picked up by helicopters. TimberWest had quality control people on that site, and they were very happy with the way he was dropping those logs. I think one of the statements was: "They weren't a bird's nest. They were nice and easy to get at."

But in order to get a tree to drop a certain way, so it isn't going to slide down the hill and rip the tree to pieces, you have to take chances. If Ted wants to keep

working for this company or get contracts with this company, he has to show that he's a good, high-quality logger. It's quality control. It's the value of the logs that had more impact than the component of safety. The coroner's inquiry states that exactly. There has to be a component of safety when you're bidding on that contract. There has to be an actual allocation to a safety component.

We need this session. We need to ask what actions the Labour Minister is going to take. We need to get follow-up. We need to ensure that other loggers aren't dying because, according to the inquest, the government cut too deeply in regulations.

[0235]

The Sullivan mine. My friend and colleague from Golden and I have been working on this file for quite some time. The fact that the House wasn't sitting when the decision of the mines inspector came out is probably one of the reasons why it's become so difficult for us to get a real fair airing of what happened at the Sullivan mine disaster.

When the ministry came out and said, "Oh, this was an unprecedented incident that has never happened anywhere else in the world to the best of our knowledge," the media naturally ran with it. I mean, it was quite a bold statement, and it was made by the chief mines inspector. It was made by the minister in charge of resources and mines. The next day, if you logged onto the Internet and punched in Sullivan mines, almost every hit you got was a quote saying that this was an unprecedented thing. Brilliant — absolutely brilliant. But the fact that Teck Cominco is the biggest contributor to the Liberal Party.... I think there needs to be a second look at this. I think you need to now detach this from the other side.

In all fairness — and I'm not making any accusations or allegations.... I'm saying that that in itself gives reason to have an inquiry that says there was no bias in any way. Then the families can actually find the truth — the truth being a full and complete inquest so that the families of the victims of that disaster will have some closure on it. They will actually believe that something can be done to prevent any further fatalities.

There were three major violations of the health, safety and reclamation code — three major violations, one of them being signing in on the site. If that first employee who went missing, who was found dead two days later, had signed onto that site, the second employee looking for that person would have seen the vehicle there. They would have opened the logbook and said: "Wow, he's been here for two days. He's probably dead. I'm not going in that building."

But what happened was that he thought he had just gotten there, so he went in after him. He came back out and called the paramedics and said: "I think there's a drowning." He went back in to try to rescue him and said he was going to see if he could do CPR. He went down into the well, in the confined space, and succumbed to the lack of oxygen.

The paramedics were called to a drowning. The first paramedic went in, climbed down the ladder, got

on the radio and said: "Is there gas in here?" That was the last thing she said. The young 21-year-old paramedic, concerned about his partner, immediately went in there, and he succumbed.

For the ministry and the mines inspector to say that no one should have been concerned, nothing's changed, and that building has been there for a while.... Well, that building, up to a week before that disaster, had work done around the perimeter of it. About four months prior to that, it was enclosed.

When you look at WorkSafe regulations and at the health and safety mine reclamation act, there are some gaps there. They are gaps that need to be addressed, which we need to bring up in the House. We need to say to the minister and to the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Mines and Petroleum Resources: "We need to fix these gaps. We need to make sure this doesn't happen again."

So three major violations, four fatalities, and the government is saying that this is a freak accident. No oxygen in a mine is not a freak accident. They used to take canaries down into a mine. It wasn't for music or entertainment. It was because if the birds stopped chirping, you got the heck out of there fast. It wasn't a freak accident, so we need that inquest. We needed this session to push for that immediately on the day that report came out. We would have been in this House demanding that we deal with it.

[0240]

About two weeks after the ministry announced the rent subsidy, a 73-unit building in my community, Chelsea Place Apartments, was sold. It sold, and it immediately sent eviction notices to all 73 tenants. Some people have lived there for 30 years. Some are seniors, and some are disabled. They were asked to move out by December 31 — New Year's Eve. Try getting a moving company on New Year's Eve. A lot of them panicked and moved.

The company said they were going to renovate. They had no permits in place. Case law shows that that is a breach, a violation. You need permits in place before you can evict, yet they were able to evict only because everyone had filed for appeal. Some didn't have the money, so we put up money for them, and a lot of community people assisted in putting up money for them.

The reason that people left was because the act is now re-regulated in such a way that it benefits the building owner and discriminates against the tenant. With appeals all filed on time, the first appeal of the mass evictions was going to be heard on the 7th of December. Well, the evictions are on the 31st of December, and the tribunal doesn't have to render a decision for 30 days.

January 7 would have been when the board or the tribunal could have rendered a decision. How is that a balance? How is that fair? How is that a proud deregulation? "Oh, there are too many regulations in it. Let's eliminate some of these regulations." Again, it wasn't an elimination of regulation; it was a changing. It was a passing off and putting an onus and a hardship on those who are the most vulnerable. That's what this

government has done many times over since I've been in this session.

We can't continue on like this. We need to do the people's business in here so that we can bring forward matters such as this and so that we can continue to hold this government accountable for their actions so that we are not off-loading the responsibility of homelessness and evictions to our municipalities, and we're not off-loading closures of mills and businesses in our municipalities because of regulation.

We need to sit, and that's why I strongly speak against this motion. I thank this House for its indulgence.

J. Horgan: I thank the member for New Westminster for his comments. I know that if he'd had more time, he would have reminded the House that the Victoria Shamrocks are better than the New Westminster Salmonbellies, but I'll do that on his behalf.

It's a pleasure to rise and speak against the motion brought forward by the Government House Leader, although I'm not surprised by the motion. In fact, beyond claiming almost single-handedly the Grey Cup victory for the B.C. Lions, the hon. Government House Leader said nothing but "the House do now adjourn," since we arrived last Wednesday. I was waiting for him to say that if it wasn't for that tipped pass that he caught in the corner of the end zone, the Lions wouldn't have won. Fortunately, the member for Port Coquitlam-Burke Mountain was able to cut him off before he went too far.

I also want to correct the record while I'm on my feet. The hon. Government House Leader has been saying almost ad nauseam, when we've been raising matters of substance and importance to people in our constituencies, that the House was brought back for one purpose and one purpose only. I want to remind members and those who may actually read this some day, or even in fact — perish the thought — are watching it at quarter to three on a Tuesday morning, that we were brought back to this Legislature at the direction of the Speaker, not by the Government House Leader.

In fact, the Government House Leader never called me, and I don't expect him to ever call me. I did get a note from the Speaker, and he said: "Hon. Member, the Legislature is reconvening after consultation with the government of the province of British Columbia. I am satisfied that the public interest requires that the House shall sit."

[0245]

I'd have to say that the public interest is a far cry from the whims and fancies of the member from Abbotsford, the hon. Government House Leader. In fact, I would argue that the public interest is paramount to each and every one of us — all 79 members in this place. Were we sitting in a fall session, as we would have anticipated, having looked at any website that advertises this place or talks about a fixed calendar, one of the gimmicks that the government brought in when it came to power, like open cabinet meetings.... It's been 18 months now. I can't wait now for my first

open cabinet meeting. I know the hon. Finance Minister is excited about that, and she's looking forward to it as well. We should have known early on that this was just another gimmick from the hon. Premier and the government, the B.C. Liberals.

The fixed election dates — you'll recall that as well. That was the precursor to the fixed calendar. We should have known that they probably wouldn't call the session if it didn't suit their interests. I recall that in 2005, the government tabled a budget. They had two and a half months before the writ period, three and a half months before the election, and they said: "Everybody out. Let's go. Party on. Back home. Let's tell everybody how great we are. Let's leave our two courageous opposition members, the current member for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant and the illustrious Joy MacPhail. Let's leave those two here at the Legislature, and we'll go out and tell the world how great we are." So much for a fixed calendar, then. That should have been a hint.

Hansard has done us a great service. It's provided us with an inventory of the number of days the Legislature has sat since 1992. I know the member for Peace River South will be interested in these statistics. In 1992 under the first year of the NDP government, the House sat for 111 days. The year after that — 90 days. The year after that — 80 days. I could go on, but let's do some averages instead.

Over the first six years of the NDP government this House sat for 479 days. Now I'm going to give the B.C. Liberals a bit of a heads-up here. I'm going to give them the 17 days in 2001 when the NDP government was in power. I'm going to throw that onto their total, and they come up to a huge 336 days. Do you want me to help you with the math, hon. Speaker? That's a whole bunch less. That's what that is. Even the member for Nelson-Creston would be able to tell you that's a whole bunch less.

The fixed calendar is another gimmick, just like transparency and open government — gimmick, gimmick, gimmick.

The public would like to believe what they hear from the government on the other side, but they can't. They just can't. The fact pattern is inconsistent with reality. I don't know if this is parliamentary language, but I like to call the people on the other side fraidy cats. Am I able to say that? I see the Clerk is here. Maybe he can advise on that. I think they're fraidy cats. I think the minister — pardon me, the member; I wish he was a minister — from Peace River is a fraidy cat.

We came back here last week at the behest of the Speaker, not at the behest of the Government House Leader, and we have....

Interjection.

J. Horgan: We have this thing here. It's called the *Orders of the Day*. This is the bible. This is what guides us in this place. I want to just thumb through it for a moment, if I may. I'm not just going to pick out the very positive and forward-looking pieces of business in

here that have been brought forward by members of my side of the House. I'd like to, for example, speak about my friend, the member for Kamloops-North Thompson.

Number 1 on the order paper. If this was a functioning parliamentary democracy like everyone assumed it was when we were elected to this place, we would be able to debate the member's motion, which reads as follows: "Be it resolved that this House recognizes that sport and recreation fishermen contribute substantially to the economy of our province." I couldn't agree more. Why wouldn't you want to debate that? I know the member for Kamloops-North Thompson would want to debate that, and I know the member for Peace River South would want to debate that, but apparently the Government House Leader does not.

I recall last Wednesday when we came to this place, we had a motion to seek unanimous consent, and that was denied. The next order of business on the order paper would have been our good friend from Kamloops-North Thompson. And why not? Able fellow, positive motion — something that we can all endorse, and something the public would want to hear us speak about.

K. Krueger: Preach it, brother.

J. Horgan: Hallelujah.

But what did the hon. Government House Leader say? That this House now do adjourn, and down he went. It surprised the daylights out of me.

I went home. My kids said: "Dad, how'd it go today?" I said: "It didn't go too bad. We asked the government a few questions. They seemed to be fraidy cats. They said: 'Let's cut this short and come back tomorrow.'"

We came back the next day, and what happened? The hon. Government House Leader stood in his place and after we said nay to the unanimous consent, he said that this House do now adjourn. I've got impressionable young people at my home. One is able to vote next time. I can guarantee he's not going to vote for the fraidy cats on the other side. I can guarantee it.

[0250]

What am I to say to these impressionable youths about the functioning parliamentary democracy that we live in here in British Columbia? I have to say that although they would assume this place belongs to the people, the Government House Leader thinks it belongs to him. It's his domain; it's his fiefdom. The Government House Leader can call what he wants when he wants, and be damned to those on the other side. It's unacceptable.

This morning I was snowed in. I live in Luxton. On the way out to Sooke I was snowed in. My neighbours helped me dig my car out. One of my neighbours took his skidoo and made two ruts in the road so that I could get my car down and get on the street to get here to kick butt on the other side of this place.

They said: "You get out there, member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca, because that's why we elected you to go

to this place, the people's place, and represent us — not to do the bidding of the Government House Leader, not to do the bidding of the executive council, but to do the bidding of the people of Malahat-Juan de Fuca." And I do that proudly.

We've had a number of presentations this evening, and I want to comment on a couple of them because they really resonated with me — certainly the scholarly presentation from the member from Whalley with respect to what became known, I suppose, as the 9:05 motion. He did a very, very good job of dissecting and cutting up the pap that was being put forward by the Government House Leader with respect to what we should and should not do in this place.

Fraidy cats run away. We've got 33 people on this side of the House and 46 people on that side of the House. The public expects us to engage. The to-and-fro of debate — goodness knows, something good might come out of that. Something good might come out of a discussion, an exchange of ideas — people on this side, people on that side.

I've already suggested that there's a perfectly good motion here right at the top of the order paper from the member for Kamloops-North Thompson, but I'm going to look at another one. Let's go down the paper a little bit further. The member for Delta South speaks about agriculture all the time, and I think that's a great thing. Apparently she has a committee all to herself. It's a Liberal agriculture committee.

I know people in the Cowichan Valley, which I represent — a strong agricultural community — would be delighted to talk about those issues with her, but apparently the all-Liberal committee only goes to all-Liberal ridings. They decided not to go to the breadbasket of Vancouver Island to talk about agriculture because: "Sorry, not on the agenda. Not an incumbent riding. We'd better move on."

Shame on her, but she's got a very good motion on the order paper. I'd like to read it to you, if that's okay, hon. Speaker. It's number 45. It's from the member for Delta South: "Be it resolved that this House recognizes the value of greater provincial influence over federal fisheries management of the B.C. wild fishery to increase revenue and protect jobs."

Hear, hear. Well done. Member for Delta South, that's a very good resolution, one that I think we could all support. It's certainly one that we should all be debating because it's right here on the order paper, the bible — what directs us in this place. Or at least that's what we thought until we came across our good friend the hon. Government House Leader, who said again on Thursday afternoon.... If I could take us back to last week after a riveting question period, a to-and-fro, a little bit of this, a little bit of that.... He stood in his place and said: "This House do now adjourn."

Now, we on this side of the House had offered up a couple of, I thought, pretty good suggestions for debate. Emergency debate is what it's called. I think it's Standing Order 35 in the standing orders. We put forward over the course of those three days three very good and timely presentations to this Legislature. The

Speaker ruled on them, and he ruled against us. That's unfortunate, but certainly I respect that ruling.

Why wouldn't the government, if we're all here, want to talk about the shelter allowance? Why wouldn't they want to talk about that? It was good enough for the UBCM convention. It was good enough for the partisan convention in Penticton. Why wouldn't they want to talk about that here with members of the opposition, with a diverse cross-section of the population — with a representative sample, I would argue?

Here we are, representatives of our communities. Why wouldn't he want to debate those issues? It's perplexing.

A. Dix: Or do something.

J. Horgan: Or better yet, do something about it. But at a minimum, we're here. You're patting yourself on the back for: "What good boys are we. We're going to do this sometime in the future." Why not do it right now? It's pretty cold out there. I would think that a shelter allowance would go a good distance to keeping people out of the snow at this time of year.

Another issue was raised by my friend from Vancouver-Fairview. It staggers me. My constituency contains the Sooke reservoir. I see members drinking water on the other side. Well, this beautiful water comes from the Sooke reservoir. It's always pristine and clear, and I can look through it and see the member for Vancouver-Burrard.

[0255]

In the city of Vancouver, for over ten days, the public had to boil their water. Astounding, absolutely astounding. This isn't Bangladesh. This isn't some underdeveloped country. This is one of the most prosperous countries. We are among the most prosperous provinces in the best country in the world, and we're boiling our water.

We have representatives from all across the province here, ready to engage, ready to debate, ready to come up with ideas, solutions to the problems of the day. Why in the world wouldn't the Government House Leader want to talk about that? I said to my friend from Kingsway: "What's that all about?" Perplexing is what it is — absolutely perplexing.

Nonetheless, we put those issues forward, and the Government House Leader chose to say: "No, we'd better adjourn, because we don't have an agenda." Forty-three days into the calendar in 2006, and they've got no agenda — nothing at all; bubkes. But we've got an order paper, and there are a couple more on here that I'd like to touch on. The two that I'm going to speak to next are for members on this side of the House, but I hope that's okay with you.

The member for Surrey-Newton. Motion 60 on the order paper:

"Be it resolved that this House urge the government to ensure that, when a landlord of a manufactured home-park gives notice to end a tenancy agreement in order to convert all or a significant part of a manufactured home-park to another use, manufactured homeowners receive adequate compensation from the landlord and the land-

lord is required to put in place a relocation agreement that is satisfactory to the manufactured homeowners."

That's a great motion. I've spoken to this motion, and I know that there are other members in this House who would want to speak to it as well. I raise this one because since we last sat in this place in May, I've held public consultations in my communities in Sooke and Langford and in the Cowichan Valley. Hundreds of people have attended those meetings to talk specifically about this motion and the legislation that was passed by the government on the other side that takes the rights away from manufactured home owners — takes the rights away from those as individuals within our community. Unbelievable.

I see the member for Surrey-Newton here. I'm just speaking to your motion, if that's okay with you. Are you all right with that?

H. Bains: Absolutely.

J. Horgan: That's good. I knew you'd be happy with that. A very important motion on the order paper, available and ready to debate.

The member from Burrard has brought forward a piece of anti-bullying legislation, one that I spoke to again in the spring session and that I would be delighted to see pass in this place. I know that members on this side are supportive. I think there's some trouble on the other side, but I'm sure that if we had an open and fulsome debate, some of those issues might be softened and rounded out. Perhaps even some friendly amendments from those who are opposed at this point in time would be acceptable to the member from Burrard, and we could pass that legislation. We could say as a Legislature — together, united — that bullying is unacceptable in the public school system. In fact, it's unacceptable right across the province.

I know that member would like to do that. I know members on this side of the House would like to do that. But are we going to do that, hon. Speaker? No, we're adjourning the Legislature now. We're cutting and running. If George W. was here, that's what he'd say. You're cutting and running — a bunch of John Kerrys over there.

Shame on you. Stay. Tough it out. Stay the course. Let's debate. Let's do something useful. Let's say to the people back home that they didn't waste their time going out in the rain to put an X in a box for us. Quite frankly, there are a lot of people who are saying: "What's the point? We didn't vote for this. We didn't vote for that." I hear it every day.

"Member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca, why are you not in the Legislature?" "Well, I'd like to be there," I say. I quite enjoy being in here, hon. Speaker. It's a beautiful building. I have good friends, sometimes some spirited debates. But not this fall, even though the fixed calendar said so — another gimmick. Again, I await that first open cabinet meeting in a year and a half — very excited about that.

I also want to talk about a presentation that was made earlier by my friend from Columbia River-

Revelstoke. I think when we look back on this day — I know I will at any event — it will be the day that the penny dropped on the other side. I know the Government House Leader was smiling like the Cheshire cat, saying: "Okay, we've got them now. We're going to just adjourn the House again, and we're all going to go away."

The member for Columbia River–Revelstoke stood up and said: "For the next half hour I'm going to be talking about this." You could just see the faces dropping on the other side. "I'd better cancel my helijet. What am I going to do? There's the fundraiser tonight, and here I am stuck in the Legislature."

It's a shame no one on the other side wants to stand up and debate. When we look at *Hansard* from this short session, what are we going to find? We're going to find that the member for Prince George–Omineca had something to say, a few members of executive council, and that's it; nothing else. Every member on this side of the House will have spoken. The member for Prince George–Omineca will have spoken, a couple of members of executive council, and that's it. Uh-uh. Isn't that a shame?

[0300]

When we look at the order paper, there's another issue that I want to bring up. It has to do with a motion that was put on the order paper by my colleague from Esquimalt-Metchosin. This is an important one, because it's certainly very topical in our communities. The member for Esquimalt-Metchosin and I share the border of the town of Langford, and we've been working very hard on an issue in a large development there called Bear Mountain and the impact that that development has had on sacred sites and historical usage of first nations in the south Island.

This is a very important motion that was put on the order paper way back in the spring, and we were very anxious to discuss it. I know the member from Esquimalt had it at the top of her priority list. It reads as follows:

"Be it resolved that this House urges government to consult with First Nations communities to establish First Nations artifacts and midden protection protocols for all communities in British Columbia and a program to assist in protection, conservation and stewardship of First Nations archaeological sites."

A very important motion, one that I'm sure we would all be able to support.

On the particular issue of Bear Mountain, I was at a longhouse ceremony with the Government House Leader, the minister for reconciliation and treaties — if not Nisga'a treaties. I'm not sure of the total name of the ministry, but it was historically called Aboriginal Affairs. The minister was in the longhouse ceremony. It was a real honour for me to be there, invited by one of the local chiefs to participate.

The minister was there, and he spoke in glowing terms, metaphorically, about the fire. He kind of lost me about halfway through, but he seemed to be interested in solving the problem. That was three weeks ago. The cameras went off. The clips were put on the television. The story ran in the paper, and then where

is the minister? Nowhere to be found. Here adjourning debate is what he's doing. I should have known that.

I can go back to those first nations members and say: "Well, I'm sure that the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs would have been very happy to solve your problems, but he was too busy shutting down debate in the Legislature of British Columbia." Unfortunate, I'm sure, at a minimum, but I think reprehensible that you could go to a place as sacred as the longhouse and make commitments and then disappear.

You come into this place — a golden opportunity, a motion on the order paper. You don't even have to make it up; it's already right there. The member for Esquimalt-Metchosin has already done the legwork. You just have to debate the issues. We could amend it. We could improve it. We could make it better.

I have discussions all the time with the member for Peace River South. I genuinely believe that he and I and others on that side of the House can agree on the substance of most of the issues that trouble the people in our communities, yet we're prevented from doing that because of the adversarial relationship that exists between the two sides of the House.

I have tried over the past 18 months — desperately tried — to be conciliatory, to be open to discussion, open to dialogue, and I think that the members might find I'm a bit edgy since we came back. I'm a bit aggressive. Well, you know what? Get used to it. Let the member for Malahat–Juan de Fuca be the member for Malahat–Juan de Fuca. That's what you're going to get from now on, because I'm tired of waiting for these guys to live up to the promise of their rhetoric. It's just not there. It's all gimmicks. It's all mirrors. Pay no attention to the problem in the corner, because it's the best and greatest and wonderful place in the world, bar none. Bubkes. That's what it is. It's garbage. It means nothing — bar none. Give me a break.

I've tried very hard, and I know that two of the members — in fact, three of the members — who are staring over this way.... I speak to them regularly. I believe that we do share a common vision on many....

Interjection.

J. Horgan: Yup, with the member for Kamloops–North Thompson being one of them. I believe that there are issues we can agree on. I believe that there are things that we can advance collectively in our various communities in the interests of all British Columbians, and I know they believe that too.

But here we are, five past three, and I'm just filling time. I'm saying that these are the issues that I'd like to discuss in more detail, if I had the opportunity. But I can't, because the Government House Leader says: "This is my place, and I don't want you to be here any more." Fraidy cats — and that's apparently parliamentary language. I'm delighted about that. I've learned something today. "Fraidy cat" is okay. I look at the Clerk, and he's nonplussed, so that must be good. That must mean it's okay.

[0305]

I wanted to talk a bit about some of the issues that.... I'm now the critic for Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources, and I'm delighted to be able to spend some quality time with the member for Peace River North. I think he and I are just hitting it off marvelously, and it's just going to be a flourishing relationship as we go forward.

One of the issues that troubles me.... I have to talk about my children. I know there's a pundit, Will McMartin, who thinks I spend way too much time talking about my kids, but I can't help it — they're my kids. And I know other members want to do that.

The most pressing issue to my oldest son is climate change. He came up to me the other day — and I know the member from Hastings has heard this story way too many times now, so he's going to be rolling his eyes — as I was in my shorts, and he said: "Dad, does it bother you that it's 29 degrees on the 15th day of October?" I thought to myself: "Well, it doesn't bother me at all, actually. I'm looking forward to cutting the grass." And he said, "Well, it should bother you, dad. It's not supposed to be 29 degrees on the 15th day of October," and he hopped on his bike, and he rode away.

He won't create a greenhouse gas if you paid him money. He won't take a ride, even if we're going in the same direction. That's his commitment. His younger brother asks for a ride down the driveway. We've had two children with the same input, the same DNA, the same everything. One takes it very seriously; the other one has not yet come around to the importance of the issue.

I think that might well be representative of the people in this Legislature. Half the people or at least 33 of the people in the place recognize that climate change is a significant issue and one that we should invest some time in, not just casually, not just passively, but perhaps in an aggressive way, perhaps a standing committee, perhaps a commission. Perhaps a collection of members could get together and start looking at these challenges and try and come up with solutions that will address the concerns of my son and the sons and daughters of people on the other side as well.

Climate change is real. It's a problem, and we need to deal with it. I'm delighted to hear that the Minister of Energy, Mines and Petroleum Resources feels that way too. Once we get those coal-fired plants approved, we're going to put all of our attention into solving the greenhouse gas-emission problem. Just get a couple of coal plants up and running, and everything's going to be fine.

I don't think so, but I live in hope. I'm the eternal optimist. I look at my three friends down the way, and I think that if we can agree on stuff, then surely to goodness I can convince the other 43 to agree as well.

Certainly, hon. Speaker, I know you're persuaded by my arguments. We've spent some quality time together on the road, and I think that it's only a matter of time before you sign that membership card and come on over to our side.

Interjection.

J. Horgan: It's too late in the day, yeah. I'll start diving any minute, hon. Member, so don't worry about that.

I did want to spend some time talking about some of the local issues in my constituency that I would have had an opportunity to talk about had we had a regular session, or had this been the dark, dismal '90s when the Legislature actually sat, when people actually came here and did business day after day after day — opposition members.

I remember the Government House Leader puling and moaning about: "Oh, the horror, the horror. How awful it is." I think: where did your memory go, man? What happened? What happened walking across from this side of the House to that side of the House? It must be the power. It must be the arrogance. Drunk on power.

"This House do now adjourn." That's all he seems to be able to say these days. And: "Oh, I'll get right to helping you on your first nations issues and your sacred sites. Oh, the cameras are off. I gotta run; gotta go — too bad about that."

A. Dix: The Malahat.

J. Horgan: The Malahat. How could I stand here in this place and speak for 25-odd minutes and not mention the Malahat and the Malahatians? God love them at the top of the Malahat, stuck up there in the ice and the snow. I know that the Minister of Transportation never misses an opportunity to talk to me about this issue. I've raised with him on a number of occasions the need for alternative sources of transportation, whether it be train or even rapid buses between the CRD and the CVRD. Lots of people are talking about that.

Various mayors in the lower Island and in the Cowichan Valley are talking about these issues all the time. Only one variable missing from the equation, and that's the government of British Columbia. "Oops, sorry. It says here you're not an incumbent riding. We'll have to get back to you on that one. Thanks for calling," and off they go.

Malahat-Juan de Fuca is the interface between the south Island and the north Island. We have one thin ribbon of road called the Malahat Drive, and that's supposed to sustain the economy of south Vancouver Island. About 750,000 people live on this rock. That's a whole bunch of people. You'd think we'd get more than one little, tiny ribbon of highway. You'd think there'd be alternative modes of transportation. You'd think that maybe a couple of the cars off the RAV line could be used to run up and down on the E&N corridor.

[0310]

We had local mayors purchase the line, local first nations come together. They took over the E&N line and they said: "We're going to turn the train around. We're going to go from the north to the south in the morning and from the south to the north in the afternoon." Everybody applauded. Everyone said: "What a

great idea. Let's call the provincial government and see what they say." They looked on their map, and they said: "Malahat-Juan de Fuca. That's not an incumbent riding. Why did we even take the phone call?"

I thanked the hon. Minister of Transportation for discussing these issues with me, but it would be kind of nice to put a little bit of money on the barrelhead, don't you think? Don't you think that would be nice? Wouldn't that be handy? It's all well and good to have a couple of nice ideas on this side of the House, but a little bit of coin to make them go through would be helpful as well.

I know that the people in the South Cowichan and those that use the Malahat every day — even those up the Island, further up to Nanaimo and beyond — are going to be happy that I'm in this place tonight talking about the Malahat. They would be happier if I was here again tomorrow and here again the day after that and the day after that urging the Minister of Finance to just loosen the purse strings a little bit and say: "Maybe there are some other parts of British Columbia that could use some of that transportation financing. Maybe it's not just the Olympics."

I suggested once that we put a ski jump on the top of the Malahat, and I know that the hon. Minister of Tourism would agree with that. We could put an Olympic venue at the top. I know it's like the Jamaican bobsled run when you come down Tunnel Hill. We could use that as an Olympic venue and maybe throw a little bit of cash our way, a little bit of cash to southern Vancouver Island. My colleague from Esquimalt-Metchosin would be delighted with that.

It's just an idea, just a thought. Maybe you could take that back to your caucus, because after we shut this place down again, we won't have the opportunity to interact like we are today, having this fun, exchanging ideas back and forth, we on this side and you guys on the.... Well, we on this side, anyway, with ideas, and you on that side, not so much.

I'd also like to talk about some local government issues while I still have the time. One of the positive things about being here and being in a city that's also represented by the Minister of Community Services is that I bump into her on occasion. It's kind of unavoidable in a small town. I give her full marks. The Minister of Community Services has been very open to my ideas and suggestions for solutions in the south Island, and we exchange those ideas quite often.

I sat on a community cable show the other day that we.... I stopped her car in the parking lot so that we could have an exchange, because we couldn't do it in this Legislature. I meant no harm by that. I think the minister is doing a very good job. She treats me very well, and she's very respectful of my ideas. But it's unfortunate, in a parliamentary democracy, that the interaction between a member on one side and a government minister has to be in the parking lot instead of in this Legislature.

Again, I go back to my neighbours who dug me out of the snow this morning. "Go give them hell," they said. "Go down there and give them what-for. We want

our fair share here." We're not greedy in Malahat-Juan de Fuca. We don't want all that money that's going into the Sea to Sky Highway. What would we do with it?

We'll take a little bit of the RAV line, though. I think that might be important.

Deputy Speaker: Member.

J. Horgan: Oh, it's that time? Who would have thought it? Thank you very much, hon. Speaker.

Interjections.

J. Kwan: Just as my good colleague the member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca sat down because his time had run out, I heard the government members — the member for Vancouver-Burrard, the member for Kamloops, the member for Peace River South — say: "More."

You know what. There could be more. The only thing that the government has to do is defeat the motion to adjourn debate, and there will be more, plenty more, because there is much to do in this Legislature. Make no mistake about it. I just heard three government members who heckled across the floor and said: "More." Well, they have every opportunity, as we engage in this debate today, to actually vote against the government's motion to adjourn debate.

The Government House Leader said, when he moved this motion, that there was no other business to do in this Legislature. He said there was no other business because all of the work has been done. Well, I have to beg to differ.

[0315]

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to simply pick up the orders of the day, which my colleague from Malahat-Juan de Fuca had picked up and had started to cite a couple of the motions and bills that needed debate on. I've had this all night, and I've been looking at it. As a matter of fact, effective November 27 — mind you, that would have been yesterday; we're now on to November 28 — under "Introduction of Bills," there are six bills that the government could allow debate on, for first reading debate to take place on these bills.

They are important bills. They are absolutely important bills which both the government side and the opposition side had actually put forward. Setting aside for a moment whether or not we support these bills or how we feel about them, the point is that there ought to be an opportunity to debate these bills.

There's a bill on the Mandatory Booster Seat Use Amendment Act, which I would personally support. I have a 3½-year-old child who now is actually desperately wanting to get out of her car seat because she thinks that she's a big girl. She wants to sit like her mama and dada, without the car seat. Well, she can't. In fact, children should be protected, while they travel in a car, with either a car seat or a booster seat, based on their weight. That's correct, and it's the right thing to do. We couldn't engage in that bill's debate.

Today the Leader of the Opposition conducted first reading debate on the Parliamentary Calendar Act,

2006. That's a debate that's well worth considering, well worth engaging in a dialogue about in this Legislature. All that does is enshrine the standing orders that we talked about earlier, around the proceedings in this House with respect to regular schedules for the spring session, the fall session, the days of debate and the hours of debate.

Another bill: the Auditor General Amendment Act, 2006, introduced by the member for Victoria-Hillside. It's another excellent bill that deserves the opportunity for debate in this House. The Workers Compensation Amendment Act, 2006, introduced by the member from Delta North. The Promotion of Safe Antifreeze Act, introduced by the member for Alberni-Qualicum, and the bill to protect anaphylactic pupils in school, introduced by the member for Saanich South. That's six bills that the government could call and allow for debate to take place on.

Then I flip on over to the next page, and what do I see? Amendments were put on notice, and they happen to be government bills that were left over from the spring session. Then you go further on down, and there are a number of written questions from the public that were put on notice. In total there are 43 of them. I won't take the time to read all 43 into the record, but suffice it to say that there are 43 questions on the order paper today from members of the public who wish to have answers from the government.

I'll just read a couple of these questions to put it on record, to give you a flavour, Mr. Speaker, of the answers the public are seeking. Question 3 is: "Who is the Province's representative when meeting with B.C. Ferries regarding the Ferry Commissioner's preliminary decision on BC Ferries' application for an extraordinary price cap increase?" Valid question. Don't you think, Mr. Speaker, that the public deserves an answer to that?

Another question: "When the parties meet to discuss the Ferry Commissioner's preliminary decision regarding BC Ferries' application for an extraordinary price cap increase, do the parties consider the effect of the increase on individual community members?" It's a valid question from members of the public who wish to know — not from members of the opposition but members of the public who wish to know — to which the government has not provided an answer. And if this House shuts down, they will not get an answer.

[0320]

Then other questions. It goes on to inquire: "Has the ministry reviewed the death of the other toddler who died while in the care of Ryan Dexter George?" A valid question as well. Another question from the members of the public: "Was the original purpose of the previous contact checks — also known as PCCs — to permit social workers to ascertain if, how often and when a subject family of an Intake has had previous involvement with the MCFD?"

These are questions from the public, yet the government doesn't see fit for the public to get the answers. Why is that? What is the government trying to hide? Why wouldn't they want to give answers to these

questions to members of the public? In total there are 43 written questions from the public inquiring about various topics and issues, and the government wants to shut the House down so the public would not have the opportunity to put these questions forward.

Then there are private members' motions. There is a total of 71 private members' motions. I don't agree with all of them, but that doesn't mean those motions don't deserve the time and the space in this Legislature for debate. Then there are other bills, private members' bills that were left over from the spring session. The bill intituled Tobacco Statutes (Prohibiting Tobacco Sales From Pharmacies) Amendment Act; the Safe Schools Act; the Human Rights Code Amendment Act; the Payday Lending Act; the Crystal Meth Prevention Act; the Utilities Commission Amendment Act. Those bills only moved to second reading stage. They actually didn't get a chance for full debate in this Legislature.

Given all of this work yet to be done on the orders of the day, does it really mean to say, as the Government House Leader says, that we actually don't have any more work to do? Or is it the government's choice to not do any more of the people's work? I would submit that government does make choices, and they have chosen in this Legislature, on this very day, to stop doing the people's work. They made that a conscious decision, and they made that decision flying in the face of the public's demand, for this Legislature to answer some critical questions that they're interested in. The government made the choice to end debate. That's what we're here about. Let's not kid ourselves.

I know very well that the opposition will do our very best to slow this process down, but there is only so much the opposition can do. At the end of that process the government will bring in their majority members, and they will pass the motion to end debate. Effectively, they will be scot-free in that they won't have to answer any more questions from the public or the opposition. That's their intent. Make no mistake about it. And they will get their way. But does that make it the right thing to do? That is the question.

That's all theoretical — I'll say that — in terms of the issues I've just highlighted from the orders of the day. In some ways it's an exercise around procedure. But let me then just turn to the issues at hand which all of us have in our own ridings. What does it really mean when we choose and make the decision to not deal with these issues? What does it really mean on the ground for people in our communities?

[0325]

Well, let me just talk about what it means for the people in Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. I have quite a crisis on my hands in my riding of Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. A couple of weeks ago there was a boil-water advisory.

There are some 7,000 people who live in what we call SROs — single-room-occupancy hotel accommodations — in the downtown east side. They don't have a stove in their homes. Some of them, if they're lucky, have a hot plate. If they're really lucky, that hot plate can generate enough heat to perhaps warm up a can of

beans. There is no way, however you could imagine and stretch your imagination to think about it, that that hot plate could boil water safe enough for them to drink when the boil advisory was on.

Seven thousand people in the community living in SROs. As the boil advisory continued day after day after day — it was lucky that it was finally lifted — for these people, it meant that their health was put at risk. It meant that they wouldn't have the wherewithal to get safe drinking water.

Now, so be it that the health authority did go around giving some water out here and there. It was a little bit of a hit and miss. I actually had my office contact the health authority and ask them if water was being distributed in my community, if the people who live in SROs, the people who are homeless, were able to get some. They then proceeded to tell me that, yes, the health clinics were offering and giving out free water. Then they proceeded to tell me that a number of community centres that they had identified were giving out free water.

Then I asked them: "How do people find out about it? How do people know that they could access this free water?" I was told the answer: "By word of mouth." I thought: oh, okay. Then I'll use my word of mouth to spread the word, to let people know. Then I discovered in that process that not all health clinics distributed water. Then I discovered in that process that not all people were able to access this water. In fact, in some clinics, going in to get free water meant that you got one of those little cups with the pointy ends. That's how you actually got free water. Well, how about that for a change?

Then I discovered that for the schools.... I thought of children. I immediately worried about the children in my riding — inner-city schools, lots of children, lots of low-income families. How were they getting the water? Then our office was advised that school boards were on their own, because that's not the jurisdiction of the provincial government. They have to figure out where to get the funding from to supply water in the school system.

Then I thought: who else is not getting the water, and how are we addressing this? Now, I have to say that yes, effort was made by the health authority. But at the end of the day, who was missed in this process? Perhaps what the government should do is order some sort of review on how this situation was handled, if for nothing else than to learn from it for the future.

We could engage in that very important work in this Legislature, engage in that debate for a review on how the government handled the boil-water advisory that was issued in the lower mainland, and especially to understand how the people who are the most vulnerable in our society actually got access to safe drinking water. That's just one issue.

I want to raise another issue. We have another crisis going on in our community, and it's called homelessness. I've heard many people in this House who talked about the issue around homelessness.

Let me tell you a little story, Mr. Speaker, and how dismayed I was to learn of it. It was about a month ago — maybe a little bit more than a month ago — when I heard this story. Just by way of background, I started doing advocacy in the downtown east side over ten years ago. Housing was one of the key issues that brought me into the community — having lived in substandard housing, understanding how difficult it is to try and manage all the issues and the financial demands that my parents faced, and so on.

In my own community I learned of this story from a fellow named Ken Lyotier, who runs United We Can — a depot, basically, for dumpster divers. He told me of a story, and it took my breath away.

He said: "You know, let me tell you what happened just a couple of nights ago. Outside of United We Can we have an awning, under which there's some coverage — shelter, if you will, from the elements." As he was closing up shop and heading home, there were a whole bunch of people outside. It was rainy, it was wet, and it was cold.

There were people already lined flush against the wall of United We Can's front window. Some people had already camped out, so to speak, in that space. They were going to camp out overnight. Many people, in fact, lined up flush against the wall so that their bodies, their legs, weren't hanging outside of the awning areas.

Then an incident occurred, because of a late arrival, I guess. Somebody arrived a little bit late, and there was only enough space for him to sit perpendicular to the wall. This meant that his legs were hanging outside of the awning area, which meant that he would get wet and cold. Then an incident occurred, because the fellow said to the other guy: "Do you think you can move over just a little bit so I can get a little bit more sheltered space with the awning?" There were disputes, and the cops were called.

[J. Yap in the chair.]

Ken said to me: "Have we deteriorated to the point where people are fighting for square inches of awning space? Is this where we're at in 2006?" That's a crisis that is going on in my community today.

I moved a motion in this House on the first day that we were back — an emergency resolution calling on the government to immediately raise the rates for the shelter portion for people on income assistance, which the Premier acknowledged that there was a need to do at the UBCM. At the UBCM municipalities urged the government to act on it. Many said that the single most important issue they were faced with was the issue around homelessness.

This fall session was meant to deal with legislation. The government had the opportunity to bring forward legislation to address exactly that and to raise the income assistance rates — the shelter portion — for people in our communities. That would have alleviated some hardships for people, but not all. I fully acknowledge that, but it would have been a good step, a tiny little step — wouldn't it?

It might have helped the person who was fighting for that square inch of awning space. It might have made life just a little bit more bearable for those people who live in my riding, the lowest-income riding of all ridings in the province.

Let's not make a mistake about this, because it was this government and this Premier that in 2004 rolled back welfare rates. By how much? Let me tell you. For an adult and two children — that would be single parents — the support rate in 2001 was \$590. The shelter rate was \$610.

[0335]

The government rolled back the support rate to \$572, and the shelter rate to \$555. That's a reduction of a total of \$73 for a single parent with two children on income assistance.

Two adults and two children. The rate for 2001 was \$615 for the support portion. The shelter portion, \$650. The government rolled back their shelter rate to \$590, a reduction of \$24 in total. What was the justification for that? I will never know. I fought against this change in the Legislature then, in 2004, and I speak against it now.

The government says, though, that they now recognize the hardships caused for people on income assistance, especially on the housing side, and that they were going to increase the rate not now, but in February. Well, how on earth do you justify — as we look outside, where we have a blizzard and a snowstorm — the government not increasing the rate effective today for people on income assistance?

Mr. Speaker, this is not academic. This is real for the people in my riding. They're impacted by this lack of action, where the Government House Leader says: "We don't have anything to do." What is more urgent than for this House to do something that will actually enhance the quality of life for the people who face hardships in our community?

Isn't that the reason why we got sent here? Isn't that the reason why many of us ran for office? I'm sure that is the reason why at 20 to four I'm standing here talking about this. It's not because I enjoy staying up in the middle of the night just for the heck of it, but because I know how much this is needed for the people in my riding. I implore the government to do the right thing. There is an opportunity, and it is the government's choice to go down that road if they wish to.

We sit here relatively comfortably, even though it is 20 to four. We're sheltered from the rain, the cold and the snow. At the end of all of this, I bet you that I know exactly what the members are going to do. They are going to head home to their comfortable beds, to the warmth of their home, and they're going to have a good sleep. Many of the people on the streets don't have that choice. People on income assistance face a much higher rate of homelessness. They don't have that choice. We could change that. It's up to all of us to do that and say: "No, I will not tolerate that. I will not stand to see children and families out on the street. We can do something about that right here, right now." That's the choice that government members will have to make. I know from the opposition side, from all of

my colleagues, that we will stand ready to support the government immediately if that's what they want to do.

I have no reservation about saying that, no hesitation whatsoever. Right now in the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, yet another crisis is going on in my riding. On November 19 a group of women occupied the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre. Why? Because they needed a safe place — a refuge for them to access, because there isn't one in the downtown east side or in all of Vancouver for women, for that matter — an all-night women's shelter.

They occupied that shelter. Do you know what the staff and the volunteers found? Over a hundred women stayed there for that first night. More than half of them were homeless. They continued on the next night; 80 women stayed there, and again, over 45 of them were homeless.

[0340]

The staff and volunteers went out that evening and did a homelessness count for one hour in the streets, and they found some 60 people sleeping in alcoves. What is wrong with that picture, Mr. Speaker? What is wrong with that picture? Can we sit here and sort of feel okay about it, knowing that this is going on?

The women's centre is asking this government for support to fund an all-night shelter — \$700,000 will make the difference, to fund them for a full year to do that. Now, having said that, the women's centre people don't actually want a shelter per se. What they really want is appropriate housing for women, but they're not getting that, because this government made a conscious decision to cancel over 1,700 units of affordable housing since they took office in 2001. More than that, they decided not to actually continue to build affordable housing at the rate at which it was being built under that horrible NDP government.

As a result, since 2002 there is now what we call a housing gap, with 2,500 units of affordable housing — housing that would have been built under the former policies of the NDP — that are not in our communities today. What is wrong with that picture? We enjoy a \$1.3 billion surplus, and we can't find the money to build housing for people who are sleeping on the streets, yet we want to invite the world to come in 2010. That is British Columbia's Olympic shame — to see all those people sleeping on the streets — and \$500,000 for VANOC, just on the eve of 2010, is not going to do it.

You cannot sweep the people under the carpets, because they are real, and they are real lives. This government can actually do something. So it's up to the government members who sit here in this House today. Look in your hearts and see if you find it within yourselves to say, "We are going to act, and we are going to pass legislation today to increase the welfare rates for people on income assistance," so that they, too, have an opportunity to find a home, so that they share some of the economic successes that this government likes to crow about, so that those who are most vulnerable actually have a moment of relief, a shred of hope that there can be a brighter future for them.

I do believe — and let me close on this, Mr. Speaker — that Members of the Legislature came to this place because they believed that they could make a difference, a difference to do different things that enhance the quality of life for the people in our communities. I do believe that. We disagree on many things, but I do think that people do want to do the right thing.

Here's the choice before you. Defeat this motion to adjourn, allow the Legislature to carry on, and bring forward legislation to increase the welfare rates for people on income assistance immediately. Then I also invite the Premier, the Minister of Finance — who is also chair of the Treasury Board — the Minister for Housing and the Minister of Community Services to come on down and tour the women's centre. I extend that invite to all the government members. Talk with the women firsthand to understand the plight that they are faced with and address the issues and concerns that they have.

C. Wyse: At a quarter to four in the morning, Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in opposition to the motion to adjourn. I do so with great reluctance. It would have been my preference that the Government House Leader would have chosen an entirely different method of doing the business of the province than the one that we are presently in. But there's an interesting situation that has developed, presenting an opportunity for this House to take advantage of. Earlier today, or is it yesterday...? I'm not quite certain what the rules of the House are, whether I'm still stuck in Monday or whether I've flipped over and gone into Tuesday.

[0345]

My recollection is that some time, a while back, we had discussion here in this House on the Trillium report. In the Trillium report, which was, I think, on the day shift back where I am... I think now I'm on the midnight, and the afternoon shift may have come home, and they may not know what the Trillium report is about. Very briefly, as a reminder about the Trillium report — not to everyone here in this House, because I know they were listening very intently when we debated this yesterday or today...

The Trillium report is a report of school district 27, the Cariboo-Chilcotin, which demonstrates that in order to balance the budget, school district 27 must consider shutting down eight schools. That report, coupled with information in the financial report of school district 27, identifies that the funding shortfall is a direct result of this government here not providing the funding for Bill 33, and likewise, not providing adequate funding for the provincially mandated programs that are in existence.

Yesterday the member for Cariboo North and I brought to the attention of the House that there would be a public meeting held in Williams Lake to actually discuss that particular item of business. So I am able to report to the House some of the transaction that took place at that particular meeting. I hope that when I present this information to this House with one other piece of information that wouldn't have been appropri-

ate, the Government Leader, along with the Minister of Education, will accept the need for actually defeating this motion and providing the opportunity to solve the problem that presently is facing school district 27 and other districts, likely of a rural nature, that have the same type of problem.

Hard to believe, but I can report to the House that in Williams Lake to discuss the Trillium report was a full house — standing room only. People wanted to come and discuss the closure of the schools that were in their various communities. The issue of rural taxpayers and the funding formula comes into play. Forcing their schools to be shut down and having such an effect upon their communities was raised at these meetings.

The piece of information that I advised the House I'd like to draw their attention to is that my office has received correspondence from local governments up in Cariboo South wanting the Minister of Education to review the trustee distribution. The reason they want a review of the trustee distribution is because the closures of the schools are going to be voted upon by this local government.

They want realignments that they believe reflect more accurately the situation of populations that exist in school district 27. The communities are split on the need for the trustee redistribution. In actual fact, I have a plea from one of the councils that I should intervene in this sooner than later with the Minister of Education so that, in part, this fight doesn't become embittered.

Government House Leader, we have an opportunity here to avoid having communities pitted against each other in a rural part of British Columbia, communities that will be torn apart as a result of decisions that have been made in this House. Mr. Speaker, that reason alone is sufficient for this House to defeat adjournment and come back and do the business that faces this House — what I was elected to do, to bring items of this nature to the attention of the House in a fashion so that the House can act in a timely manner.

[0350]

The report has now been made. It rests with the government in order to set aside the difficult situation that will pit community against community.

Another local issue that has developed recently and that I would like to draw to the attention of this House to has to do with issues of seniors care.

A very quick review of the situation that developed in Cariboo South. As a reminder for the people on the afternoon shift, or people who are getting up to go on the day shift, the Interior Health Authority is the extension of the government applying the financial results that have been given to them for the administration of the health aspect.

Approximately five years ago Interior Health reduced the availability of seniors housing by 24 percent. In Williams Lake that had a devastating effect. The closure of Deni House and Cariboo Lodge led to the displacement of many seniors. The displacement was caused by the closure taking place before the replacement beds and facilities were in place.

Deni House has been opened and shut down on a number of occasions. Seniors have turned up taking beds in Cariboo Memorial Hospital because they do not have a place to go. Approximately a week ago Interior Health Authority once more advised Williams Lake residents, without any consultation, that Deni House will be shut down again. Once more that leads to additional pressures upon those seniors that are placed in Deni House.

To give you a small flavour of some of the correspondence that I've received around this matter.... Tanya's father Ron lives in Deni House. They are very upset about this item. The father had to wait for his placement to get into Deni House. Upon getting in there, his preference would be to simply remain where he is. In talking with her, his wife Vera has implored that I draw this to the attention of the Minister of Health. I do what I can to convince the Minister of Health that Deni House should remain open.

I have correspondence on this item, and I'd like to briefly read to you extracts from the correspondence from family members of another individual there.

Barry writes me:

"I am writing this in regards to my mother being a resident at Deni House in Williams Lake. Mother has been a resident here for the past while due to needing complex care for pulmonary lung disease. Now I am hearing that it will be closing in the spring and all residents moved to Seniors Village.

She spent six weeks in the hospital waiting to get a bed in Deni House, has just settled in, and now another move — deplorable. The government should be so ashamed.

I am very concerned about this, as our seniors do not have a choice in where they go in Williams Lake. Seniors Village is very nice, but it's too fancy for a lot of Cariboo residents, as they have chosen to live in a simple lifestyle like my mother's."

Barry goes on to describe how Deni House, which is publicly run, allows pets to be with her mother. In Seniors Village, which is privately run, that is not allowed.

[0355]

Greater Williams Lake is one of the few areas, if not the only area, covered by IHA that does not have a mix of public and private services offered for seniors care. In actual fact, one of the senior members, in speaking to the people of the Williams Lake area the last time this issue was up.... I can't remember what closure it was or what reopening it was. They were told by IHA that ideally the best combination allowed to be provided was a mix of public and private services.

With the addition of 11 beds.... I do want to recognize that there have been additional beds provided in the Greater Williams Lake area. The more recent announcement of the upcoming additional 11 beds could have been Deni House. It did not have to be replaced — those additional beds — in Seniors Village. That is what has the community equally upset.

Also in the area of health, remaining upon that theme, there are some issues that have come up in Cariboo South that should be dealt with here in this House, rather than adjourning — issues that the resi-

dents of Cariboo South take very seriously and wish to have resolved. Those residents are not NDP, Liberal, Green. They're not party members. They're simply British Columbians living in a part of the province, who wish their government system to deal with their issues once they have determined who their elected officials are.

This House on many occasions has had the issue of ambulance care and the lack of ambulance care being adequately provided throughout the Cariboo, and Cariboo South in particular. However, an issue that this House is not likely familiar with is.... In October of this year the chiefs of the Chilcotin area advised me that they were concerned about the lack of service on a regular, frequent ongoing basis with the Alexis Creek station being shut down. The chiefs of the Chilcotin — five of them — have communities that continually and consistently are not provided with ambulance care on any type of a regular basis.

They have asked me to continue to press for the government to come up with a solution that they have been aware of since 2004. Since then the situation has continued to decline. We now have community leaders that are coming into my office on behalf of their representatives, looking for solutions. Surely, rather than adjournment, we should be carrying on with resolving those types of issues.

Likewise in the area of health, a trauma patient from 100 Mile was refused service on September 15 even though there is a no-refusal policy in existence for trauma patients. For 14 hours that individual stayed in 100 Mile. In December of last year I raised the same issue here in this House with the Minister of Health. At that time an individual had a three-hour delay in receiving the care they should have received immediately. The Minister of Health advised me that he would investigate that item. For sure that policy is in place, and it should have been adhered to.

Here I am again in this House — 14 hours this time. I would like to have that opportunity to pursue that here in the House with the minister.

[0400]

Also in 100 Mile, on October 12, a most tragic set of circumstances occurred. There was a six-hour delay for the air ambulance to arrive. During that six-hour delay an individual died. I've written the Minister of Health on that item, looking for an investigation, some type of an inquiry to determine why that tragic set of circumstances did develop. I would like to know, on behalf of the residents of Williams Lake, given that trauma patients can't get out, that this type of situation — the air ambulances also not necessarily arriving in a timely fashion — does not continue to jeopardize unnecessarily the accessibility of the residents of Cariboo South to the health care that the policies of this government are set up to provide. To me, that is a reasonable item on its own for this House to continue, to provide the opportunity for the business of the people of British Columbia to be dealt with.

We have the issue, also in the area of health from Cariboo South, of queue-jumping for a fee. A resident of Williams Lake was provided an opportunity to

move up in the queue if that individual had been willing to pay a \$350 fee. Rather than waiting until February of 2008, for \$350 that individual would have moved up to approximately 30 days. As a result of actions taken by this side of the House, the question at least was able to be posed to the minister — one good example, in my judgment, of why the government should defeat or withdraw their motion for adjournment so that we can get on and deal with some of these important items from Cariboo South.

I do recognize that it may only be me, the MLA for Cariboo South, that believes that these issues are important, but I would like the opportunity to at least present those issues in front of the government, the total House, so that we can then make a determination on the importance of these items.

One more item in the area of health. Clinton has a health clinic. Clinton, likewise, without consultation, within the last week has been advised by IHA, the Interior Health Authority....Those back in Williams Lake or in Cariboo South who are just coming in off the night shift or wherever they may have been at five past four may not have heard me talk about what IHA stands for. The arm of the government, the reduction of services in Clinton....That's the same area, for those of you who may have forgotten, that likewise regularly and frequently does not have an ambulance, because they do not have the trained paramedics in enough quantity in order for them to remain staffed. So they have ambulance problems and now a reduction in service for their health clinic. Again, no consultation.

When I was back in Cariboo South on the weekend, I met with the mayor of Clinton. He conveyed to me with no reservations that this was a very serious item for the village of Clinton, and he has asked that I do what I can to turn that particular item around. Once more, to the hon. member for Abbotsford—Mount Lehman.... It's one more item that, in my judgment, we should continue sitting for at least until Thursday, while we try to address some of these issues of a pressing nature from Cariboo South. It would at least provide me an opportunity, and maybe some of my colleagues from both sides of the House, to have their people's business done in this House.

[0405]

I'm going to leave health, and I'm going to move on to some other items that, likewise, are important to the people of Cariboo South — their business. Some of my colleagues have already raised the issue. We have this item of dead cattle. We have this ongoing issue in my riding of trains going along, running through herds of cattle, killing them, burying them. Then, sometime along the way, they advise the ranchers that this particular incident has taken place.

This issue continues to remain unresolved. It remains outstanding. The fact that when the government sold B.C. Rail, it did not do due diligence and ensure that the practice that did exist under B.C. Rail of the railway looking after the fencing.... This issue has now developed. CN will not continue that former practice.

I have written to and had discussions with the Minister of Agriculture. I've written to and had discussions with the Minister of Transportation. I have written the Minister of Transportation about this item on numerous occasions. No luck in getting any action.

The Agriculture critic met with the ranchers from up in the Cariboo, and the critic for Transportation likewise has met with the ranchers up in the Cariboo. They have reported to this House that they have found these people to be honest, hard-working, sincere individuals that simply would like this issue addressed by this House, by this government. To me, their elected representative, that's a reasonable request to be made. I wish the House would continue sitting so that we could have a chance to further debate that item.

We have issues around road restoration. The increased traffic with beetle-kill, the increased number of eighteen-wheelers and the number of B-trains travelling on roads that were never built to have that type of either weight or frequency of transportation, has led to a variety of issues, safety as well as road deterioration.

It is important for me to mention in this House that the government, in part, has recognized the seriousness of that issue and has budgeted some funds to go towards addressing and resolving that important issue. I commend the government for doing that, but I would like the opportunity to report to the House that it has been inadequate. As much as the government may have thought that they had it all mapped out to deal with, they don't quite have it bang on. I would like the opportunity to pitch for improvements in that area.

The other thing that goes along concurrently with this item of roads is the small contractors. The guys and gals that have dumptrucks and that type of equipment are telling me that they are being squeezed out. They don't have the opportunity to bid and get in on road reconstruction in Cariboo South — an issue that was also in Cariboo South approximately a year ago, out in the Chilcotin. In working collaboratively, we were able to resolve that issue. This issue has now appeared in the Greater 100 Mile area. I would like the opportunity to make the same type of plea, to see whether the same type of a solution might be found for that part of my riding.

[0410]

Now, in the general area of forestry and economy there are some issues that need to be in front of the House here. Small-scale salvage operators tell me that with the changes of policy, they are having difficulty in accessing the fibre that is necessary for them to make a living. Logging truck drivers tell me that they are working greatly extended hours. They have been squeezed by changes in policy. They have been squeezed as a result of the changes in the appurtenancy rules, for example.

There are now fewer and fewer owners of mills. Therefore, the competition for whoever is contracting with them has been shrunk. These larger corporations have passed their expenses on to the logging truck drivers. That issue, I've discovered, not only exists in Cariboo South, but it also exists on the Island here.

Surely it's an item that is of an important nature for us to be dealing with here in the House.

The Tatla Resource Association presented a very significant concern in September of 2006. I wish to do due diligence to this particular organization and where they fit in, because the Cariboo-Chilcotin land use management plan has been referred to with great pride here in this House by members on both sides. This document here tells me that that particular document and its effect are now threatened.

The members of the Tatla Resource Association have completed the review of Tolko Industries' forest stewardship plan and were dismayed to find almost no reference to the seven sustainable resource management plans, SRMPs, which have been completed for the Cariboo.

"We cannot accept that government could approve a forest stewardship plan which fails to adhere to or even acknowledge plans prepared as a requirement for the legally binding Cariboo-Chilcotin land use plan, CCLUP. Our membership has been working for the past ten years with local residents, first nations, stakeholder groups and forest industry representatives to provide detailed input to the Chilcotin SRMP.

"Through our initial community-based planning process, followed by a unique collaboration with Alexis Creek First Nation, Tsi Del Del Enterprises Ltd., the West Chilcotin Tourism Association and the Wilderness Tourism Association, we developed the comprehensive plan which had been fully incorporated by government into the Chilcotin SRMP. TRA developed a detailed plan to meet the CCLUP timber targets and the diverse requirements of group members and government. It's a significant accomplishment, yet it has been entirely disregarded by Tolko."

I'm not going to read the entire report, but I'm hoping I can find the other part. I've got it. One more paragraph, Mr. Speaker, because I believe this drives home the importance and the significance of what this document from Cariboo South means and the importance it holds for this particular House.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

C. Wyse: I'm sorry, Tatla. I tried. I wish I had more time. I hope we'll defeat this motion so that I can come back to this.

S. Hammell: I reluctantly rise to oppose the motion of adjournment and do so because it is disconcerting to leave this place with the business of the people of British Columbia incomplete and unattended to.

[0415]

I do not need to repeat the examples that my colleagues have brought forward, for I believe our place is in this House debating the issues of importance to the people of British Columbia. That is what the people of British Columbia elected us to do, and therefore, we should not be adjourning. I believe that this session should have lasted the length of time designated in the standing orders, the length of time agreed to in the calendar, and, therefore, should adjourn on Thursday.

The House is where all of us, as representatives of our constituents, have the opportunity to bring the voices of others to where the decisions of government are made. The government and the Members of the Legislative Assembly who support the government have many forums to have people who voted for them heard. This is the place where the opposition gets to hold the government to account and to bring to the debate opposing or even different points of view. That is our job as members of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. It is our responsibility to hold the government's feet to the fire. This is the House that was built for the job.

The members on this side of the House are proud of the new tone, the new sense of civility that is being practised on both sides of the House. We are heeding the words of the Speaker, generally, and listen to the question and do listen to the answer. We do believe the House should be a respectful place regardless of our close and often passionate beliefs that are often or at times in conflict with members from the opposite side of the House.

Hon. Speaker, respect is a broad brush and has applications that are much more profound than just listening to each other respectfully. Respect means respecting this institution and all that it stands for when we consider our democracy. It means respecting the role of the opposition and the part it plays in the delivery of good government. It means understanding the role of the Legislature as a major forum for our debate. It means understanding that our democratic institutions are fragile, precious and in need of constant attention. And it means understanding that any alternative is not as good as the system we are living.

The House is not sitting this fall, and that is not respecting this institution and what it stands for. If you don't believe you need to call the House together to debate the issues and stand up to the scrutiny of the opposition, it means there is a lack of respect.

I've had the opportunity to work abroad with peoples in countries that are literally dying to have a democratic form of government. I have worked with individuals and political parties in Morocco, Algeria, Jordan and Kuwait. Our mission was always to strengthen the political skills of the participants and their understanding of the political process. I have worked with members who had little power even though they were elected and who were deeply envious of our system of government. They found it difficult to believe that the elected members of a country actually had the authority to govern without reference to the royal family, a military dictatorship, a tribal leader or the rule of the street.

One of the greatest threats to emerging democracies is the cancelling of their parliaments by greater powers because the power doesn't like what the elected members are doing. The rules are suspended and the House adjourned. Many times these cancellations last for years before the House is called back. To these leaders their parliament is not a serious place. The rules are made elsewhere and enforced by the military.

[0420]

This was again made clear to me by a constituent the other evening who is from a country that does not have a strong democratic base. He was cherishing the fact that he and his family lived here. He said to me, "In the country I come from, the might of the head of the tribe is right. Here in Canada the might of the law is right" — the laws we in this chamber are elected to make — and he is grateful.

Our democratic system works because we all own it, the government and the opposition together, because we together represent the community. We must not treat it frivolously. None of us expect to have our way all of the time, even the government, as noted by the appointment of a child commissioner today. What is important in this process is that we are heard and that our points of view are heard, on both sides of the House.

I'm returning to my opening theme, that I am profoundly disappointed that the government is determined to have its way and adjourn the House. This House is where our democracy plays itself out, where we take the ideal and make it real, and we cannot do that if the House is not sitting and the session is cancelled. Therefore, I'm going to take the opportunity to describe a few situations that I'm engaged in, in my constituency, that this House will hear of because we are sitting tonight.

One involves a small trailer park that has been in existence for many years. Unfortunately, some undesirables have moved in and created havoc for this small community as a result of drug dealing and all the tag-on activities that accompany the drug trade, such as prostitution, stolen vehicles and the movement of stolen property.

This one situation raises a number of issues that need discussion in this House. The first and most compelling to me is: why do regular people, who don't really want much but who do want a safe place to live, have to have their homes disrupted by behaviour that everyone in this House would find unacceptable? Whose responsibility is it to do something about it? Why is every solution to their problem that we look at as a community completely inadequate?

The resources of the police are stretched too far and cannot cope effectively. We have a court system that does not adequately address the offenders, and we do not have the infrastructure in place to remove the offenders or have detox facilities to deal with the addictions. We have a drug climate fuelled by the likes of crystal meth, and we appear to be helpless to even stop the importing of the chemicals needed to create the drug.

For the folks living in the trailer park, this situation is a living nightmare. Why cannot we deal with situations like this quickly and effectively, and what role does this House play in raising these issues so the government can be held accountable? These are members of our democracy and expect us, as their government, to address these issues because they cannot, nor do we allow them to.

Another circumstance is a B.C. Housing complex in my constituency. We need to discuss in this House the

wisdom of housing together seniors, the disabled and the hard to house. I suggest it is a lethal combination where everyone loses. Why should an 85-year-old woman live in an apartment beside someone who is on or dealing in drugs, who lets other people into the complex who are then found sleeping in the stairwells and who threaten to harm residents? When you are in your senior years, you need security and certainty. You don't need to be threatened or intimidated by a member of a world that you are not at all familiar with.

The government should not try to fix a homeless problem, exacerbated by their own inaction or lack of vision, by placing the hard to house with the seniors and the disabled. This is a discussion for this House and the minister responsible.

[0425]

These are issues of high regard and issues of ordinary people, and they need to be discussed in this House, the House that was built for the job. That is the reason I am so deeply distressed at the cancelling of the House and the disrespect for our democracy that it signals.

H. Bains: I, too, rise to oppose this resolution. I stand to oppose this resolution because I think it's fundamental to our existence in this House. It's fundamental to democracy. Because that's exactly what we are talking about when we say, "Adjourn this House," to shut down this House — no debate, no issues to be discussed. The government side will decide, when you come into this House, what issues are to be discussed. Once they decide that you need to go, you go home.

The public of British Columbia elected 79 MLAs — not 46 but 79. All 79 MLAs are sent to this House to talk about issues that are important to their constituents. I have issues that I need to discuss in this House on behalf of my constituents. I can't do that if this motion is passed. I can't do that because this government decided it will not call the fall session.

I just don't understand. What is this government afraid of? Two more days and we would have had some of those important issues brought to the House, talked about those issues, debated those issues and had those issues addressed in this House. But this government is deciding to suffocate democracy into submission.

I've never seen a government so afraid of opposition. Look at their history. Four years ago, when they had 77 MLAs in this House and only two opposition members, what did they do? They didn't even give them official opposition status. Why? Because that would make the opposition even stronger. That would give them resources to go out there, do the research, bring those issues out, hold the government's feet to the fire, hold it to account. They couldn't stand that, so they never gave them opposition status.

Well, they couldn't do that now because we have 33 of us. But they found another way of shutting us down. They shut this House down for this fall session after promising, after their own rules were established four years ago, that they would have a fall session. They went against their own rules.

When I decided to run in May of last year, I thought we would be able to go into that House, bring those issues that are important to our constituents, talk about those issues in this House and have them addressed so that our people would have a better place to live in this province. I thought that one of the ways to improve this province and the people's lives in this province was to have an efficient, strong government. The way to do that is to have a strong opposition.

Strong opposition, I think, is a key pillar of the good governance, rule of law and human rights of citizens. That's why, in my view, a good government wants to have a good, strong opposition — an opposition with resources, an opposition that could go out there and do its research, find issues that are important, bring them to the House and hold the government to account. Not this government, though. This government would like the opposition to go away.

[0430]

Like I said, four years ago they refused to accept the official opposition as official opposition. They are now trying to shut down this House so that the official opposition again cannot hold them to account, cannot ask them tough questions, cannot bring those issues that are important to the constituents of those MLAs.

I think that is a shame. That is a shame that we are not allowing democracy to flourish in this province. In fact, we are suffocating the democracy so that the democracy slowly whittles away and somebody, one person or a few people, can make the decisions — all of the decisions. That's not democracy. That's not what people elected us for. I think that is a shame that we are going in that direction.

We have a number of issues that I want to bring to this House, a number of issues that are provincewide, a number of issues that are important to my constituency.

In my constituency health care continues to be the dominant issue. People going to Surrey Memorial Hospital continue to have to wait in the emergency ward for hours on end. Many times they even go home without seeing a health professional because they are told that.... Either they wait four or five hours, or after those four or five hours are waited, they are again told that people with higher emergency needs are coming in, so they have to wait more hours, more time. They end up going home without seeing a health professional.

It's all because the government ignored that region of the province, that city of this province, for the first four years and paid no attention to the health care needs of Surrey. In the first four years they simply ignored it as if it doesn't exist. But when they realized they were getting closer to the election, they realized that they may not have any of their MLAs elected in Surrey.

Then they started to get worried, so only to save their political hide — again I might add, not to help the Surrey residents — they came to Surrey just before the election. The Premier came to Surrey and made all kinds of promises. They knew that it was an area they had neglected.

They made promises that they would fast-track the study to determine what kind of needs are needed in

that hospital — the study that was already done in 2001. It was sitting on their shelves. They knew exactly what was needed, but they ignored it.

Now, in order to save their political hide, they are running around trying to make more promises. The promise was made that they will fast-track that study. The study was fast-tracked, but they couldn't save their political hides in there because people were so angry.

In October the study was brought back. The results of the study were shared with the public. The Minister of Health came to Surrey in October 2005 and made this wonderful announcement. We thought, well, they have learned. We thought that they had learned and that they were actually going to pay attention to the Surrey residents as far as their health care needs are concerned. They made the announcement that there will be expansion to the Surrey Memorial Hospital's emergency ward. They gave us a time line.

Also, in addition to expanding the emergency ward, they said that there will be a stand-alone ambulatory unit built, either in the hospital or around the hospital, or somewhere else in the city. The construction time line was also announced. The construction on that ambulatory unit will start in 2007. The construction will be completed in 2009. We had a hope that these folks had listened, finally.

[0435]

Lo and behold, in June this year the Premier, the Minister of Health and his entourage came back to Surrey to tell us where that unit will be built. They took us all there — the media and everybody. They showed us that this is where they will be building that unit. They made the same announcement but with a difference, again showing the arrogance, the disrespect and contempt for that region and for those people.

The Premier announced that now the construction would start in 2008, but the construction will finish in 2009. That means it will take only one year, whereas the minister had announced earlier that it would start in 2007 and finish in 2009. At that time the construction would take two years.

If they had any respect for those folks in Surrey.... If it takes only one year to complete that construction, why don't they start at the same time as was originally announced — 2007 — so that it's finished one year earlier so that people in Surrey can have that facility one year earlier and they don't have to suffer one more year? That's one of the examples of how this Premier and this government continue to ignore Surrey and continue to be arrogant towards those needs of Surrey people.

Right now I have calls in my office. In that emergency ward, this fellow went in there with chest pains and pain shooting to his left arm. He was told that he had to wait four hours, with the chest pains and the pain shooting to his left arm. He and his family are arguing. He has a family history of heart attacks, heart problems. He believed that he was going through one. They didn't have personnel. They didn't have someone to look after him, because everyone was busy. He was told to go see his doctor after four hours. Go see your doctor and go see your MLA was what he was told.

When he talked to his MLA, the MLA couldn't bring that issue to this House because this government decided to shut down this House. There's no comfort to those citizens who are told to go see their MLAs. We want to bring those issues here. We want to talk to the minister here. Why is it that people who may be suffering from a heart attack, having to wait in the emergency ward for four or five hours, are told to go see their doctor? Or go see your MLA if you don't like the answer. Those are the issues that we want to talk about here.

I had a personal experience in that emergency ward. My daughter-in-law had breathing problems, developed a hole in her lungs. She went into the hospital. One lung had collapsed. Because it was a serious emergency, they took her in and started the treatment. But she was in the emergency bed for seven days, because there was no bed available for her to move into.

Finally, they had to make room so that she could go in and have the surgery for a couple of days. That's the kind of stuff that is going on in Surrey and Surrey Memorial Hospital. We want to talk about those issues here. They want me to talk about those issues here, but we can't do that because this government decides that those issues are not important, because they're busy-work.

Well, talk to Mr. Hussain who was in the emergency ward for four and a half hours with chest pains — if this is busywork, talking to this House about that issue. That's how arrogant this government is, and I just can't believe how far this government can go.

[0440]

As if that wasn't bad enough, you've heard about those private clinics opening up. There's one opening up in my back yard. Their way of fixing the health care system is to bring in private clinics. If you have a credit card with lots of room in it, if you have cash and money in the bank, you can have the treatment and jump the queue. Go ahead of the lineup. That's the kind of health care solutions this government provided. I think they ran out of solutions and ran out of ideas.

We have ideas on this side. We will offer those ideas. We know how to fix the health care system. We know how to do that. Their way of doing it is that if you have money, go ahead of the lineup, and bring in that kind of system, a two-tiered system. People with money can have it right away. People with no money wait in the lineup, and the lineups are extended because the resources are being extracted out of public health care and going into private health care. That's their system.

This is how brave these private operators are becoming because this government lets them do that. I read this to you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Godley, who is starting up this clinic — it's a quote from the paper — said: "What we are hoping is that we can have a relationship with the Fraser Health Authority and receive funding. If that doesn't happen, patients will have to pay." Very nice, isn't it, if you have money. Very nice. But public money.... They want to have a relationship with the Fraser Health Authority to get some funding.

It's no different than what was happening in Vancouver at St. Paul's Hospital. The equipment bought and paid for by public dollars was being used by private doctors and making a profit on that so that they could send people ahead of the other people and make money on that. Shame, isn't it? A shame.

We have other issues in my constituency. I brought a motion last time about manufactured home owners. These are the folks that built this province because many of them are seniors, and there are a few who are on disability. These folks — all they want is for this government to leave them alone. But they wouldn't leave them alone.

In 2002 they changed the act. They changed the act in favour of the developers. Now, I'm not against developers. All they're asking for is fairness. They expect fairness from this government, and they deserve fairness from this government, but they're not getting it.

They came up with one-sided legislation that favoured the developers at the expense of the manufactured home owners. It used to be that if the landowner wanted to develop that land for other uses, they were to give them 12 months' notice plus moving expenses up to \$10,000.

They changed that. Twelve months' notice is still there, but the compensation part is changed to the equivalent of twelve months' rent. Twelve months' rent comes to \$4,000, \$5,000 or \$6,000 — no more. You can't move those homes with that kind of money.

Like I said, most of them are senior people. This is how we treat our seniors? It doesn't surprise me, though, coming from that government. It doesn't surprise me at all, because all of their legislation, if you take a look, is one-sided — benefits for their friends, millionaires and billionaires, at the expense of working people and ordinary families. That's the trend in every legislation — if you want to take a look — whether it's health care, forestry or manufactured home owners.

[0445]

On health care they rip up their contracts so that their friends and contractors can come in and make some money. Those folks were providing good health care services at \$15, \$16, \$17 an hour...

An Hon. Member: Living wages.

H. Bains: ...hardly living wages, but they were respectable wages in my view, with benefits.

Guess what. The contractors came in, and these folks were brought down to \$9 an hour. What is the contractor making — the difference? The difference goes to the contractor. It's not coming back to taxpayers. No one is benefiting, except those contractors.

Forest industry. The legislation came in, and they virtually asked the forest industry to rewrite the Forest Act. "Write whatever you want; we'll sign it." And they did.

Manufactured home owners. Again, same issue. Benefit for the developers at the expense of the poor folks, old folks, seniors.

WCB. Same thing. They took the benefits away from the workers so that their friends, the big corporations, can have a break in their premiums.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

The theme is the same; the trend is the same. That's exactly what they did with the manufactured home owners. But I tell you that what you're doing to these folks who are seniors, who live in those manufactured homes, is wrong. These are nice communities that they have developed. They look out for each other, but you are uprooting them.

Madam Speaker, welcome. It's so bad that you've perhaps seen some of those folks come to your office as well.

Some of those homes are old. They are so old that they are not CSA-approved. Even if they could scrounge around some money to pay for the difference of moving and find another pad someplace where they can move to, those homes could not be moved because they're too old. They are not CSA-approved. So they are virtually made homeless — homeless at age 80, 85.

A couple sat in my office, cried — 85 years old — because their owner told them that they will be moved, and they're telling me their house cannot be moved. They built this province, as I said. They gave us a beautiful living that we enjoy in this province and this country. They made sacrifices for us. It's our duty to look after those seniors, and we're neglecting them. This government is neglecting them. That is a shameful act. They will not pardon you. They will not forgive this either.

There are other serious issues in my constituency. Homelessness. Child poverty. My constituency, Surrey-Newton, is a constituency made up of hard-working families. They make an honest living. They go to work in the morning, pack their lunchpails, go to work, do their job, come home, take their kids to the games, cook meals, go to bed and start all over again in the morning. In that constituency of mine.... In fact, it is all over Surrey, but that part of Surrey, in Surrey-Newton, is affected by homelessness quite badly.

If I give you some numbers.... Homelessness in Surrey has doubled over the last few years. There is Hyland House. Their report says that they turned away 3,135 people in the past 12 months. That's how many people they turned away — 3,000 people in one year.

Another organization — Options. They said they turned away 350 people a month. That's another 3,600 people turned away in a year. You're looking at 6,000 homeless people turned away.

[0450]

It is so bad that one of the previous Socred ministers stopped me one time. He told me that the issue of homelessness is not confined to Surrey anymore. He said it was moving into an area that he had never seen it in before: Cloverdale. He reminded me that the property that we purchased when I was on the Kwantlen board, to move our trades component of the college, on Highway 10....

He said: "On that property, behind those bushes here, there are at least 20 to 30 families living there homeless." They are moving across; they are moving out, because the situation is so bad. The situation is so bad, Madam Speaker.

As you know, government statistics show clearly that the number of low-income people in B.C. is the highest in Canada. This is at a time when we are boasting that the economy is booming here.

Who is benefiting from this economy? It's a very few people at the top. Most of them.... When they were asked, "Are you benefiting from this booming economy?" a majority of them said no, they were not benefiting from it. So who is benefiting? It's benefiting only those whom this government wants to benefit, those whom this government designs its legislation to benefit: their friends, the top 10 percent or 20 percent in this province. That's who they are.

They were elected to govern and represent all British Columbians, but they are failing the majority of those folks. The majority of them are not benefiting from their policies. They're not, because it's designed that way by this government.

I have the pleasure of dealing with another issue, an education issue in my constituency. The government would like you to believe — and perhaps they have some statistics — that the enrolment in the province is on the decline. That's why they're laying people off; that's why they're shutting schools down.

In Surrey the enrolment is increasing over the last few years, but we still see fewer teachers, fewer teacher-librarians, in Surrey. What is the explanation for that? There is no explanation. It's poor management; that's what it is.

We have schools in my constituency that are probably some of the oldest ones. On a walk through those schools they showed me that in order to do the seismic upgrade of one particular school, they are actually making it so narrow that the gym is becoming dangerous for the players to use now, because they have to put some walls inside, so they take some room from the gym. The bigger players are running into the walls now.

That's the kind of stuff that we want to talk about in this House, but they don't want to hear that, because they think they've got all the answers and that opposition is not needed. That is bad democracy; that is bad government.

Any government or any leader that thinks that the government should not have a strong opposition is doomed to fail its citizens, and I think that's where you're going. That's where this government's going, because they're shutting down the opposition. They are trying to find every loophole that they can find to make the opposition ineffective, but they will not be successful. These folks on this side will never let you get away with that, never.

[0455]

I want to turn to the portfolio that I was given to talk about: the 2010 Olympics. I'm glad that the minister responsible is in the House. Perhaps I shouldn't be saying that. I'm sorry if I said that, Madam Speaker.

People are worried. They're worried that the cost overruns are being incurred and that the public isn't told about it. They continue to say that the government is paying only \$600 million, not a dollar more.

I think my time is running out, but I just want to say that the Auditor General came up with a report that confirms everything I've been saying: that the true cost of the Olympics is close to \$2 billion to the citizens of this province, not \$600 million.

Madam Speaker, with that, I'd like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

N. Simons: I usually start off by saying that it's a pleasure to be standing here talking about issues that are important to British Columbians. I'm kind of disappointed that I'm standing up just before five o'clock in the morning of Tuesday to talk about issues that I think not only should there be people listening to at home, they should be listening at other places, including here in the Legislature.

It's difficult to conduct the business of the province in this manner. For that reason, I'm disappointed with the decision of the government to, first of all, cancel the fall sitting and then, when that obviously didn't work, in order to fulfil the expectations of Justice Hughes, call a quick session in order to deal with one issue. Well, the constituents that I heard from were not pleased with either the decision or the approach of the government to deal with important issues.

Now, I've already spoken at length about the decision we did make today in the appointment of the Representative for Children and Youth. I reiterate how....

An Hon. Member: An important decision.

N. Simons: Absolutely an important decision, thank you, and a decision that we've waited a long time for. I'm just pleased that we did accomplish that today.

There are a number of other issues that we would like to accomplish as members of the opposition — most importantly, to bring to the attention of a government that may not know otherwise that there is a serious crisis in this province around poverty, around homelessness and around the rapid sell-off of our natural assets to interests that have no interest in British Columbia other than profit. There are issues around forestry policy that really make a mockery of not only the agenda of this government, but also its ability to put into practice appropriate management mechanisms to accomplish its stated goals.

The issues that my constituents would like me to raise in this House, where the business of the public of British Columbia is supposed to be discussed, include issues around ferries. The communities which I represent are all ferry-dependent. Every single person living in my constituency is unable to drive to their home without going on a ferry or a boat or an airplane. Some people can swim, if they're long-distance swimmers. However, for the most part, barring a few minor exceptions — and I thank the member for Cariboo North for

pointing out that fact — the ferries have become an increasingly expensive element in living in the Powell River-Sunshine Coast constituency.

[0500]

The issues I'd like to raise have everything to do with the Coastal Ferry Act and the need for its revamping, and this doesn't happen if the House isn't sitting. If the House isn't sitting, the agenda of the government goes through without scrutiny. As we know, the government is unable to scrutinize itself. Without the opposition in place to ask relevant questions, questions that I think are appropriate, questions that are being asked by constituents who live in government ridings in the 46 places where they received more votes....

This is a province of 79 constituencies, and 79 constituencies' voices should be heard in this Legislature, not the voices of only 46. There are 33 members in the opposition who represent a significant proportion of the population of British Columbia, who have elected us to come to Victoria to debate issues of provincial importance, and once in a while touch on issues of federal importance. We can't do that if we adjourn the House early.

We started late, and we ended early. I'm not sure if that is doing what it's supposed to, to raise confidence in the political process. We already know there's a struggle for politicians, whether they're provincial, municipal or federal, to retain the trust of the communities and the people who have elected them when they engage in this kind of gamesmanship.

I just think it's unbecoming of the Legislature to be forced to be in a position such as this, to basically talk about issues at length for a period of 24 hours, 48 hours. Really, the business of the province requires considered thought and vigorous debate, which is completely lacking in this session because of the government's desire to just come in, do the one thing that they're doing to fix a litany of problems from years gone by, hope that they can get away with it in ten or 15 minutes or so, and — as I've heard it described — then scurry back to where they're from without having accomplished the necessary business of government. I don't know. "Scurry" might be a little bit harsh.

When I think of scurrying.... I mean, I'm from a rural area, so there are a lot of critters that do scurry. I don't mean to immediately think of the.... There are a lot of cute little scurrying animals too. Quite frankly, when I think about this government hiding from the questions of British Columbians, as represented by the 33 members in opposition, I can't think of anything more appropriate than scurrying and hiding, but I'd rather be more positive.

In order to scurry and hide, one must think about what they're scurrying and hiding from. I suppose it's, in a way, representative of the attitude of this particular regime — I mean government — which is to say: "Let's insulate ourselves from scrutiny. Let's insulate ourselves from oversight. Let's become arm's-length from every decision we make in order to protect ourselves from the scrutiny of not just the public, not just the very few watchdogs that still exist in this province,

but from the members of the opposition who are duly elected to question, to ask for answers about government policy, to ask for answers about government regulations and to introduce legislation that is supposedly designed to assist British Columbians in improving their quality of life for the present and for the future."

When we cut short this parliamentary debate for purposes purely to reflect the absence of vision on the part of the government, I think it says something sad about the state of our democracy.

[0505]

We're in a provincial Legislature. There are huge concerns facing us as Canadians on a federal level and on an international level, but there are many issues that are concerning to us as residents of British Columbia first and foremost.

As I mentioned, one of the concerns is the increasing cost of living, the three fuel surcharges for ferries. The cost of getting to and from the Sunshine Coast or Powell River has gone up exorbitantly in the last four years. The government says: "That's B.C. Ferries. Sorry, we have nothing to do with it anymore." They bring up the "you started it" kind of thing that I used to hear in grade 4. I sometimes even said it in grade 4, but I like to point out that I've matured a little.

Interjection.

N. Simons: Yeah, thank you. I'm being heckled again.

The truth of the matter is that we're supposed to discuss issues of importance to British Columbians here in this Legislature, according to the rules of the Legislature. What makes it particularly disquieting in this particular circumstance is that this is the government that talked about openness and accountability. You know, I don't think people are fooled by that anymore.

I don't think the average citizen who pays the slightest bit of attention to provincial politics actually thinks that this government is much more than the slogans they come up with or the PR departments that manage to sell distasteful legislation to a public that's primarily preoccupied with just being citizens in this province. I think, quite frankly, it's a disappointment to most people that they see us debating whether we should debate. I thought we were past that.

I thought this new tone that we've set in place here would be reciprocated by government, but no. This new tone either scared the heck out of them or made them think that they are above civilized debate. That's the cornerstone of our democracy, having a debate about issues that are important to British Columbians in the Legislature according to a fixed session.

Well, here we are on a snowy, early Tuesday morning, talking about whether we should all just go home and forget about it or whether we should actually stay and do business until Thursday, when we were scheduled to adjourn. I think it's disappointing that we're here discussing whether to adjourn or not. There's a lot

of business that needs to take place. There's a lot of work that needs to be done.

I'm not insulated from the people who've elected me. I see them whenever I'm in my constituency. People talk to me about the work that I do, and they shake their heads or roll their eyes or shrug their shoulders and wonder how our government gets away with that. And it gets away with it — with public relations campaigns; glitzy slogans: the best place on earth to live — since 2001. It's Orwellian, really, when you think about it.

I'm disappointed because as a relatively recent politician, I was hoping that the process of being elected and being in the House would reduce the cynicism I have about politics. Quite frankly, the actions of this government reinforce the cynicism I have about politics. I'm struggling on a daily basis to convince people that there's a purpose in this, and I'm hoping that they realize that here we set the legislation that governs a whole lot of aspects of our lives.

I would really like to be able to speak about issues facing our ambulance workers. I'd like to bring to the attention of the province that we need to do something in order to treat them with the respect that they're due. I believe we've let them down.

[0510]

I believe we've failed to address the crisis in homelessness, failed to address the problem of lack of affordable housing. These are issues of the downtown east side, yes. These are also issues in our rural areas. I see tents in the woods. I see cars with sleeping bags and pillows in them. These are the people that are living in the best place on earth. They're living in their car. They're living in a snow-covered tent.

As I stand in this overheated chamber, I think that there are a lot of people less fortunate, and it's for them that we've been elected to come and serve in this House.

It's not fun being here at five, but there could be a lot worse places to be. I'm here because we're trying to fix that, not trying to figure out why we shouldn't be here. We're debating a motion put forward by the government to just go home, essentially, before we deal with the issues. We don't need to deal with them until February. I'm sorry, but there are a lot of goals that we need to accomplish.

Let me take this opportunity on behalf of my friend from Cariboo South. Members of the Tatla Resource Association have completed a review of Tolko Industries' forest stewardship plan. The FSPs make headlines in a lot of places. FSPs are nothing about stewardship. Forest stewardship plans. They should be called "forest plans." They have nothing....

An Hon. Member: They should be called "legalese."

N. Simons: Yeah. They should be called "lawyers' interpretation of forest plans." That would be a long title, and it would give away too much. Actually, what it would give away is the fact that these do nothing to create certainty on the land base or even....

Interjection.

N. Simons: Communities are wondering: what is the purpose of a forest stewardship plan? They really have no say. They're cut out of the process. It's another example of the government's ability to cut itself off from receiving any criticism for bad policy. That's just shocking.

I'll just conclude about Tolko's forest stewardship plan. It is exceedingly generalized, contains very few measurable results and will fail to state how key non-timber resources such as tourism and recreation will be accommodated.

Above all, to not adopt or even address the provisions of the sustainable resource management plans, which were in place and were expected to take some legal effect, suggests to us a disregard for the non-timber resources of the region as well as the years of work by planning participants. It's basically saying to the communities, like it has everywhere: "Thanks for coming. Thanks for talking to us. That's called consultation. We'll do whatever the heck we want."

I suppose it takes a government that's more sure of itself to be able to stand up and defend itself. A government that's afraid that their policies have failed.... I don't blame them for not wanting to answer questions in question period. For a government that really hasn't got answers to the problems it's created.... I don't blame them for not answering questions in question period, but don't run and hide.

Interjections.

N. Simons: I mean scurry and hide.

I know there are good people on that side of the House, and I mean no disrespect to them individually, but they are representing a government that is causing the increase in cynicism among the general public. I find that disappointing. I'm not going to lecture them on how disappointed I am in them. I'd send them all to their room, but most of them are there. I would just say that the population of British Columbia deserves better.

We mustn't lose sight of the fact that all 33 of us will be working extremely hard in our constituencies if we're not allowed to continue here until Thursday. We'll be working in our constituencies to deal with the issues, to try and advocate on a case-by-case....

Interjections.

[0515]

N. Simons: Of course, my hon. friends on this side of the House remind me that yes, in fact, we will be doing the work that's needed in all 79 constituencies that have not had the level of service in the past that we believe they deserve as British Columbians.

I know that in my offices we're essentially the advocacy office because there's nowhere else for people to go anymore. I have people coming into my office to talk about workers compensation problems. We'd love to be able to be here to listen to the member for New

Westminster make suggestions on how to improve the Workers Compensation Act.

Those are issues that come in on an individual basis to my office weekly that we can deal with in a provincial setting here. There's a direct relationship between the concerns that come through my door in Powell River or in Davis Bay that we're here to deal with in a provincial government. It's provincial jurisdiction; it's provincial responsibility. The people of the province expect provincial legislators to deal with those provincial issues.

We have a transportation corridor on the Sunshine Coast that's like a ribbon up the coast. It's one road. That highway is a dangerous highway. We've had numerous fatalities on that highway this past summer and in the fall. Everybody on the Sunshine Coast and in Powell River knows that it's inadequate and knows that we've outgrown that particular piece of Highway 101. We need lights at intersections. We need signs in dangerous corners. We need pavement where the road has eroded into the ditch. We need a maintenance contract with some company that will actually make our roads meet minimum standards.

We've had roads flooded because the ditches weren't cleaned. We've had trees covering signage. We've had gravel swept onto the highway. It's a danger for everybody. Cyclists have been hit. Cars haven't taken corners properly. This is an issue that is raised repeatedly in my constituency, and I would love an opportunity to ask the Minister of Transportation what he's doing about it. Is he enforcing the highway maintenance contract? Do we know what's in that contract? Is it adequate?

I would suggest that this is the House in which to discuss those issues. All I can say now is: "I'm sorry. The minister is aware of the problem, but he's got other priorities." The minister has priorities that don't reflect the needs of my community.

On the issue of child care. The child care operating funds, CCOF, support many child care centres in this province. The federal government has cut \$455 million, causing British Columbian families and day care providers a lot of consternation. I'd like to ask in this Legislature, where this kind of information and exchange of information is supposed to occur, that the minister responsible for child care guarantee that B.C. won't cut operating funds for licensed child care, that they'll clarify their government's short- and long-range plans, if they have any — and I mean that with no disrespect — and whether they're demonstrating to B.C. parents and child care providers that we are actually supportive of affordable, quality and regulated day care in B.C.

I'll go back to my office, and somebody's going to come into my office and say they can't access day care or that it's a complicated process or that they haven't been provided with any subsidies, and I'll say to them: "I'll do my best for you on an individual basis." But I would like it if we were in Victoria talking about a range of plans that don't deal on a case-by-case basis.

[0520]

Again and again we've heard the Minister of Health talk about: "Well, if you'd brought that to my attention,

I would have done something about it." What kind of government operates programs on a case-by-case basis, ignoring the fact that the larger structure of policy needs to be examined? That's why we're here.

An Hon. Member: Systemic failures.

N. Simons: We're looking at systemic failures being addressed in a patchwork manner, with a band-aid approach, and the government comes up with: "We'll deal with that if you'll write us a letter about it." I'm sorry, Madam Speaker. Most of the people in my constituency don't think that's the way government should operate. Government should be much more prepared to deal with situations beyond a case-by-case basis.

Of the issues that are urgent — and I've mentioned a few — none can be more urgent than the crisis we face with global warming. I think there is a sudden and urgent realization among most British Columbians that we have embarked, and we are well on our way, down a path that will lead, ultimately, to the failure of our environmental ecosystems. Unless we deal with those....

If we don't deal with them, who does? We're legislators with the ability to identify and address problems. We've been elected to discuss these things together in the House and to come up with a plan for British Columbia that doesn't ignore the involvement of the community. Unless we address that issue, we're failing our constituents. The place to address those issues is here in the Legislature of British Columbia.

We talk about the great traditions of democracy, and yet we act in a way that ignores the great traditions of democracy. We talk about doing the people's business, but we're avoiding doing work for the people. It's 22 minutes after five in the morning. We shouldn't be standing here debating whether we should talk about British Columbia's business. We were elected to do that. That was our job. If you don't do your job, what usually happens? But it's not my fault that I'm not doing my job.

Interjection.

N. Simons: Yeah. I'd say that I hope this is remembered by the people of British Columbia in 2009, and I hope that they make an informed decision. Is this the kind of government they want? Or do they want one that knows that it's not easy to govern — difficult choices are made — but that you don't hide. You stand up and take it.

Difficult decisions. If it was an easy job.... I don't know, there'd still just be 79 of us, I guess. But that being said, it's more of a disappointment that I stand up in the House today and talk about things in half an hour that really need a session to discuss.

I'd like to point out that in the *Orders of the Day*, schedule B, "Written Questions on Notice...." There are 43 questions, I might point out, that I've asked the government, and I haven't received one answer. That's 43 questions about child and family services and about

ferries. That must have been on my mind back in April or whenever it was. Months later.... Important questions that need to be answered, and even when we do have a session, this government manages to hide.

I'm saying that we have to keep our efforts up. That's what we've been asked to do. That's what we've been hired to do.

[0525]

People on the Sunshine Coast, Powell River have a lot of issues that they deal with. Some of the issues they deal with on a local level are divisive and complicated. Debates rage. People are divided. But ultimately, people make decisions.

They know it's difficult. It's difficult to balance the competing interests in our communities. It's as simple as that. It is very difficult to balance competing interests, but we were elected to do that on a provincial level, and to wilfully walk away from our jobs as legislators, I think, is an abrogation of our responsibility.

With that, I conclude my remarks.

B. Simpson: As I stand today, I reflect on a comment that was made during our orientation in this Legislature by the Clerk of the House, who made a very deliberate statement that he wanted us to pay attention to. I was actually sitting on the government side. Our caucus was split on either side of the House. I was sitting in one of the government members' chairs.

The Clerk said: "This is your House." He said: "It's not the government's House; it's your House. It is the House that belongs to the elected officials of the province of British Columbia, not the government's House."

It is a fundamental principle of parliamentary democracy in this province that every MLA has a right in this House to bring the voice of his or her constituents to the attention of the government, to the attention of the people of British Columbia. Therefore, I stand to oppose this motion of adjournment, because what, in effect, the government is attempting to do is to make this House their House. It's not their House; it's our House.

There are very limited options available to members of the opposition to raise the voices of British Columbians, particularly the voices of British Columbians that the government does not wish to hear. They either do not wish to hear it because it does not fit in with their ideological lens, or they do not wish to hear it because it brings facts and evidence that the government cannot fit into its ideology or cannot fit into its boosterism and mantra about how great things are in this province.

We have a great province. There's no doubt about that. We have a great province that is a great place to live, but under the terms of this government — one and a half terms, almost — this province has gone backwards for so many British Columbians. Their voices are being cut off.

This is not the government's House; this is our House. I take great offence when the House Leader of the government stands up in a scrum and says: "Oh, we will bring the House back. The government will

bring the House back on its terms, the way it wants to, on the day it wants to, in order to do business. We'll be in and out very quickly, because there's only one order of business."

Well, I'm proud to stand on this side of the House a few days later than that short little afternoon stint that the House Leader dreamed that he would get by recalling the House. I am proud to stand with my colleagues, who have taken the time tonight to bring the voices of British Columbians into this House, our House, and to make the House Leader squirm in his chair when he realized that we were not going to allow him to control this House.

[0530]

The House is in our control. We determined the sitting of this House by refusing to recognize the motion brought forward without due process. We controlled the terms of this House and made it sit for three question periods — something which I'm sure the government never thought we would do. In fact, I know they didn't think that. The House Leader admitted it in a scrum subsequent to the first day.

Now, unfortunately, we have to debate a motion of adjournment in order to continue to bring British Columbia's voices into this House. I say unfortunate because we are putting the staff of this Legislature out. The people who staff us — Hansard, the Clerk's office, the Sergeant-at-Arms office, the legislative dining room downstairs — all have to put up with us having to take advantage of a motion of adjournment to bring the people's voices into this House.

That is truly unfortunate because, as many of the members of this side of the House have pointed out throughout this debate, there are substantive issues that deserve to be addressed, and this is a shameful way to address them. This is not what the business of government should be about. This is not what parliamentary democracy was intended to be. It wasn't intended to be silly points of order or silly games. It was intended to be serious business and the business of governance.

There was a time when political leadership was on the leading edge of social change. There was a time when political leaders actually would stand in the face of criticism and defend their government's position because they fundamentally believed it was the right and morally correct thing to do at the time.

In my estimation, any government that refuses to stand in the face of criticism in this House, in our House, is a cowardly government. It is a government that is unsure of itself. It is a government uncertain that it is on the right path, and it is a government that refuses to face that scrutiny because they do not know if they can withstand it.

I believe that, fundamentally, over the last three days in the question periods we have proven exactly why this government does not want this Legislature back. It has nothing to do with busywork. It has nothing to do with the fact that the government is busy doing things around the province. It has to do with the fact that the government cannot withstand scrutiny,

knows it will not withstand scrutiny and, therefore, is running from that scrutiny. That's what this is about.

Here we are tonight. We are trying to get the people's voice into this House by debating a motion. If it passes, the motion will prevent us from continuing the business of this House through to Thursday. Yet the government that has taken this course of action is a government that ran in the 2001 election as the most transparent... It would be the most transparent and accountable government our province has ever seen.

There's only one way to describe the disconnect between the rhetoric and the action: shameful hypocrisy. It is shameful hypocrisy, because the government stated when it took office that it would put in place a fixed legislative calendar to do one thing: to remove this Legislature from the bounds of political interference, to remove it from interference by politicians.

Yet what have we seen in this fall Legislature? The fact that they did not bring this Legislature back is crass political interference, and that's hypocrisy. But it's also hypocritical in the sense that the government has described the work of this Legislature in the fall as busywork, as we've heard time and time again from the members of this side of the House.

[0535]

The reality is that the fall session is the legislative session. According to the Premier's own words when he brought in the fixed calendar, it's supposed to be the session in which legislation comes forward so that the people's work can get done so that in the spring, which also has the budget speech, throne speech and estimates debate, we can be unburdened to allow us to fully explore every ministry's budget and to examine in detail the implications of those service plans and those budgets.

Quite frankly, the fact that we did not have a fall session is not only an attempt to avoid scrutiny, it is also proof positive that this government has lost its way and that it does not have an agenda for British Columbia beyond the 2010 Olympics, which we know they are failing to manage appropriately. It does not have an agenda beyond what it accomplished in the first term, which was to deregulate and to take government to the point that it is almost incapable of responding to the kind of wicked problems that we have in front of us now.

It is a government without an agenda that wishes to avoid scrutiny, and that's really what this debate is all about. This motion tabled by the House Leader on the government side is to further avoid that scrutiny by causing this House to stand adjourned rather than see it through until Thursday.

Are there things that we should be doing in this House? You bet. We've heard all kinds of things that we should be doing in this House. We've heard all sorts of stories that have come forward. One might rightly question why, as an opposition party, we want more question periods. We'd have loved a whole fall session of question periods, but at least have a few more question periods through this week.

The main reason for that is that we have proven time and again — and the members that were in the

opposition in the first term, two members only, had proved time and time again — that what we have is a government that only responds to public embarrassment. The motion that stimulated this House to come back, putting back in place the child and youth protection function, is simply coming forward as a result of the government being embarrassed.

I like to couch it as public policy by protest. If you can gather enough protest, you get the public policy shift that you want. That's why question period is so critical to us, because it is the opportunity for us to engage in that public protest.

I recall the spring session, after the Minister of Forests and Range had made an inappropriate remark in a scrum during the softwood lumber debate. We were asking in question period if we were giving up our sovereignty over forest policy in this province. The Minister of Forests, in response to a question in a scrum, said: "We don't have to worry about sovereignty over forest policy. We're done with forest policy changes for the whole duration of the softwood lumber agreement. We're done with it."

The very next day we happened to have a protest on the front lawns of the Legislature. That protest was about log exports. It was about the particular situation in Port Alberni in which a member on the government side, when he was a former Forests minister, had given away the private lands out of the tree farm licence in that region.

That group came into this House, our House, the House that belongs to the people of British Columbia as represented through every MLA in this Legislature — not just the government's MLAs. They came into this House, and they filled the gallery. I was able to stand on their behalf, along with the MLA for Alberni-Qualicum, and we were able to ask the Minister of Forests and Range questions explicit to their issues in their presence. That's how parliamentary democracy ought to work. That's what this is all about.

As a result of us questioning the minister on their behalf, they were able to get a meeting with the minister in which the minister committed that very day to do two things: to initiate a review of log export policy in this province and to give Port Alberni a committee to review their particular situation.

[0540]

Unfortunately, subsequent to that, the committee has not been followed through on, and the log export policy review has not become what people wanted it to be. It's late being tabled. We don't know the circumstances of how it will be tabled. We don't know if all of the documentation supporting it will be tabled. We don't know, when it is tabled with the minister, if it will be tabled with the public.

Those are all legitimate questions that I, as the Forests critic, and that the member for Alberni-Qualicum have every right to ask in this House and hold that minister to account so that we know, on behalf of British Columbians, exactly what's going to happen with that review paid for by taxpayers' dollars and done in the interests of the people of British Columbia.

We also have the right to question ministers and, in this case, this particular minister on why he did not follow through on a promise to the people of Port Alberni that he would show up in that town, that he would meet with those people in their own hometown, and that he would find out from them directly what their concerns were while he was able to visit some of the land base they were concerned about and experience for himself some of the concerns they had.

Well, we found out that the minister did, in fact, visit Port Alberni. The minister flew into Port Alberni, visited with the people in the office of the Ministry of Forests and Range, flew out of Port Alberni and never took the time to meet with the Save Our Valley Alliance or any of the others who have been actively engaged in the circumstance in Port Alberni.

Now that is a question that is perfectly suited for question period. It is what question period is designed for: to ask a minister why he can make a statement in this Legislature, not follow through on it and insult the people of Port Alberni in that fashion.

Question period is a critical tool for every one of us, whether to raise our constituents' concerns or to bring forward the concerns that our leader has charged us with in our critic portfolios. To adjourn this House without our ability to see it through to the end is not only an avoidance of scrutiny, as far as I'm concerned, it's undermining our parliamentary system and undermining our democratic rights, both for MLAs and for the people of British Columbia.

I would like to ask questions about highway maintenance in my riding. We are seeing some of the most phenomenal weather changes that we have ever seen, related to the changing climate. We had an individual killed on one of our roads because the road froze up an hour and a half later than the normal freeze, which is not an uncommon occurrence these days. It fluctuates three hours on either side of the norm.

As a consequence, the ten-year highway maintenance contracts this government locked this province into, that took for granted the climate would be fixed, that took for granted it would not change and locked-in to minimum standards for ten years are not working. They're not working for British Columbians throughout rural British Columbia. As we see even down here in the lower mainland, in Victoria, the weather patterns are changing, and those highway maintenance contracts are being brought into question. I would like to ask the minister of highways about that.

I would like to ask, along with my colleague the member for Cariboo South, what the Minister of Health was doing when he engaged in the closure of Deni House in Williams Lake. We're the ones who have to live with the e-mails. We're the ones who have to have the family members and the individuals who are affected by that decision come to us. We're the ones who have to provide the Kleenex, the solace and the comfort for people who have to live with the consequences of this government's decision.

We have every right to be in this House and to hold this government to account for those decisions on be-

half of our constituents and on behalf of the people of British Columbia. This is our House, not theirs.

[0545]

I would like to ask questions about home care in my community, and I would like to ask them from a business case. This government likes to think it's a business-based government. Quite frankly, some of the business decisions they make, make absolutely no sense. They are penny-wise and pound foolish. They are costing lives. They are costing individuals their livelihoods, their pensions and their savings, and they are costing British Columbians much more in the way of dispersed costs later on in the cycle.

Home care is a very good example of that, where we have cut home care to such an extent that we are forcing people into institutional care when they neither want to go there, nor is it necessary for them to go there. I would sure love to engage the minister in a question about that. And that's an immediate one. That's an issue we have emerging in our community just now. It can't wait till the spring. We need to ask those questions now. That's why we have the sitting of the House in the fall and the spring, so everything doesn't get pushed off to there.

I would like to ask questions as the member for Cariboo South asked. I'd like to pursue with the Minister of Education the questions we began today. In fact, as a result of the questions we did today, I got a copy of a letter from the school board chair to the Minister of Education that arrived by e-mail today. That letter, copied to us, asks the Minister of Education questions about the contracts they signed with teachers and support staff and the fact that those contracts are not properly funded. The letter states it explicitly. I would like to bring that letter into this House tomorrow.

That's why this motion has to be withdrawn. Let the Minister of Education face the music. Let me ask the question: are those contracts funded? When will those contracts be properly funded so that more schools don't have to close? That's a fair and legitimate question, and it is a fair and legitimate request on my part, as a member of this House who ought to have that right.

I have a young man in my riding by the name of Chris O'Hara. In an alternate life, when I actually used to teach — I moved up to Quesnel to teach — I taught this young man. He is now a father of three, with a very young family, who sees the writing on the wall. He works in one of our sawmills in town. Chris came into our office a few weeks ago and told me that he knows he needs to get prepared to move out of the industry, because my community has a very short period of time to reinvent itself before the falldown of the mountain pine beetle impacts on our cut levels.

Chris told me that to take a welding program — and we know we need welders throughout this province — in town would be \$7,200, but in Prince George, an hour and ten minutes away, it would be \$3,200. Chris wants me to find out why there's that difference. Why is it that he cannot remain in his own hometown with his own family and be a father to those children and make the transition that he sees as necessary?

Here's a young man who's trying to do the right thing by his family, by the industry and by the community. We need welders in our community outside of the forestry sector. He can get a job in Quesnel. He won't have to leave when we finally get the impacts of the mountain pine beetle falldown. Yet I can't ask those questions in here.

Now, one might say, "Okay, fine," as the ministers have indicated on a number of occasions. "Write a letter to us. Ask us that question. We'll give it back." That's an avoidance of scrutiny. This House was designed so that those questions could be asked in the public domain, so that Chris O'Hara's question could be asked in the public domain — not by e-mail or letter but publicly, so that we could get a public answer so if those in the fifth estate decide it is worthy of further exploration, they can explore it and drill down and find out if it's a general case.

[0550]

That's why we bring constituents' cases in here, because they may be indicative of a general case that is indicative of this government's inability to govern, that is indicative of their lack of a legislative agenda and that is indicative of their ability to take scrutiny.

There are also a number of questions that I have in my critic portfolio. I would like to know why it is that a group in Prince George, who dubbed themselves the Stand Up for the North Committee, have to stand up on their own in Prince George, hold a conference in Prince George on their own, without government support or funding, at which no government member would attend.

Why did that group, led by Peter Ewart and Ben Meisner and others in Prince George, have to stand up for the north themselves, have to engineer a conference by themselves, have to have their own voice heard through that when they have three sitting members on the government side of the House? And the government members of the House did not attend that. I would like to bring those individuals to task in this House. I would like to bring forward their motions. I would like to bring forward their proposals to government in a public domain, which is what this House is meant to be.

I would like to know where the billion dollars is that the federal government promised. Now we're talking real money here. Prime Minister Harper stood in Prince George during the election campaign and promised a billion dollars. Under questioning by our leader, the Premier was asked explicitly about the \$400 million in the spring federal budget. The opposition leader asked where that \$400 million was and if \$200 million of it was explicitly for the mountain pine beetle.

This is the Premier's response: "We want to maximize the benefits for taxpayers and for people who are going to be directly impacted by the pine beetle infestation. We're not going to just say to the federal government, frankly, 'Go and spend it where you want.' We want it to be part of an overall plan.... We're very much interested in complementing the British Columbia plan." His final comment on this: "That's why we'll

continue working with the federal government. I would expect that sometime in June or July we will have their response complementing our response, complementing the local action committee's responses."

Well, I think it's now November, if I'm correct — it is in the wee hours of the morning — and we don't have a federal response. In fact, I'm not aware of the provincial government, in any public way, demanding where the billion dollars is or where the \$100 million is or where the \$200 million is — in fact, the opposite.

The Premier comments that he wanted the federal government's response to complement the local action committee's response. Well, I would like to know from the Premier or the Deputy Premier or the Minister of Forests and Range why it is that the federal Conservative MPs are asking local governments directly for projects to fund so that they can spend the federal money directly on those projects — ribbon-cutting projects, sod-turning projects — in communities that are more about the next federal election than they are about addressing those communities' needs for the mountain pine beetle.

Talking about one of the local action committees, well, those local action committees that the Premier said we were going to coordinate with actually wrote a letter to Prime Minister Harper. In that letter they say: "As a response to this letter, it is discouraging to discover that the Ministry of Forests' emergency response team, and, apparently, the provincial government itself only discovered the request from the federal MPs when the Cariboo-Chilcotin Beetle Action Coalition forwarded them a copy of it." That is a shameful abrogation of responsibility for what amounts to a billion dollars worth of direct transfer that could be coming to us to help out our communities.

[0555]

I have all kinds of other issues. We have legislation that could have come forward this fall. The outdoor recreation vehicle association actually expected their legislation in the fall session. They worked with the government to create it. They wanted it in this fall session. Now they're being told the spring is too busy. They're not going to get it till spring '08.

There is work to be done in this House. There's work to be done in our House. The reason we cannot get that work done is because this government wants to stay beyond scrutiny and because this government does not have a legislative agenda worthy of this House. That's why we don't have a fall session. It has nothing to do with busywork.

It has to do with a government that doesn't know what it's doing. It has to do with a government that doesn't want the public to know that it doesn't know what it's doing. And it has to do with the fact that we have a government in power that ought to move aside and let those of us on this side — who know what we want to do, who have proven that we can stop this government cold in its tracks — move to the other side.

S. Simpson: I'm pleased to be able to engage in this debate. It's just closing in on six o'clock in the morning.

We've been here for about 14 hours in this discussion now, and I'm sure we still have a few hours left to go.

I'd like to start by thanking the Hansard staff, the Sergeant-at-Arms staff, the Clerks, their staff, the people in the cafeteria and all of the folks who work here in the buildings and who have clearly been put out by what we've gone through over the last 14 hours. I am sorry for that having happened. And I'm sorry that the government chose to breach the rules of the House and force this debate instead of bringing us in — in the morning, about four hours from now — to start and engage in this discussion. It's when we, in fact, should have started and engaged in this discussion.

But as we know, the government has been playing fast and loose with this session since day one in October, when we should have been here for seven or eight weeks. Instead, we're here for three days, only because we were able to force those three days on the government. We know that it was the intention, as noted by the Government House Leader, to get us in and out of here in an afternoon. They were going to be pleased with doing that and to not show any respect for the fact that we were to have a full session here.

As we've heard over the last 14 hours, there is no shortage of issues to be dealt with over those seven, eight or nine weeks of session. We would have been sitting here, and we should have been sitting here, if the government had kept its promises, kept its commitments and done what it said it was going to do instead of scurrying away, as I think my friend said. I do feel sorry for the staff who've had to put up with this.

The reality of the situation is that we face a pretty sad day today. We face a pretty sad day for democracy in this province. We face an adjournment debate that has happened after the three days or so that we've been able to keep this place working, when it should have been working for weeks and weeks.

Unfortunately, we have to acknowledge that we only got to deal with a limited number of issues. We got to deal with those issues that we were able to put forward in question period, and we got to deal with those issues that we were able to put forward on this Monday morning in private members' time.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Other than that, there was no other business, excepting of course the adoption of the children's representative. That's because this government saw fit to adjourn every other moment of these three days that they could adjourn rather than to do the job they were elected to do, which is to come in, put forward their program and be held accountable for that program. But they chose not to do that.

[0600]

So I think that we're in a situation where the public is going to have a determination to make, as they look back on these three days and as they look forward and see what will unfold over the coming months. The public's going to have to make a determination. They're

going to have to determine what the issue here is. Is this the case of a government that has run out of ideas? Is this the case of a government that has no initiative, at this point, to put forward for the people of the province? Is the case of a government that has no vision for our province? Is this the case of a government that has no leadership for our province?

I think that all of those things hold somewhat true. The other thing that holds true is that this is a government that has demonstrated that it truly has an arrogant disrespect for our parliamentary democracy and the obligations that governments have to make themselves available for scrutiny. For the government to make itself available for scrutiny, it does that in this place, and it does that in the sessions that we hold in this place.

We should have been here at the beginning of October. We should have been here not because the opposition says that we should be here; we should have been here because the Premier said we should be here. It was the Premier who put the fall session in place. It was the Premier who wrapped himself in the flag at the time that he did that, back early in the first session of this government, and talked about accountability and about transparency and about all those high values that he had.

Well, none of those seem to be coming to fruition today, because we didn't see any fall session. We've seen three days where the opposition has been able to use the rules to keep the government here to at least have some smidgeon of accountability for its actions — but only that much: a smidgeon of accountability.

The Premier, certainly, to be fair, has at least mused about ideas that he has for British Columbians. I saw the Premier's speech at the Union of B.C. Municipalities where he talked to the people, to the mayors and councillors of British Columbia for about an hour or so. He started out and gave us.... I thought that the Premier was having a moment of reflection on his days as mayor of Vancouver as he went on and gave a 25-minute dissertation on zoning policies in cities, but he followed that up with a number of announcements he made at that time.

I understand — I wasn't there, but I did read about it in the paper — that he also made some announcements at the B.C. Liberal convention. So at these two events.... Of course, he also announced, apparently while he was in China, that we may have offshore oil and gas in three years or so — who knows?

The problem here.... What did he announce? Well, he talked about green cities, but we don't know exactly what that means. We don't know exactly what he's talking about when he talks about green cities. The Premier talked about some indeterminate increase in shelter allowances for people who are on income assistance, but we have no clue what that increase might be or what that might look like. Apparently, it's something that will occur in the budget next year. We also had some allusion to grants for children which they might be able to realize in 20 years' time or so, to help with their education.

Now, it was interesting, as these announcements came forward and we had the opportunity to speak to some of the people who work for the government, that a number of those people who work in some of the ministries who are affected by these decisions didn't have any notion that this was going to happen. So they're scrambling to try to put the pieces together to determine what these announcements of the Premier might look like. At some point, I assume, we'll know something about them.

[0605]

The problem with this is that they were all pretty vague ideas, with not much substance to them in terms of where they were going. We had no opportunity in this place, in the people's House, to discuss or explore their credibility or their value. We had no opportunity to question the Premier or question the appropriate ministers in this place about these programs that the Premier talked about in his speeches, which he continues to talk about in speeches and which some of the ministers go out and make announcements about in their speeches. But they will not bring those issues to this place, where they should bring them, where we can have that discussion about those issues, where we can talk about the merit of their plans and discuss whether in fact those plans deserve the support of British Columbians.

How on earth did we get here, Mr. Speaker? As I mentioned before, and I think it's worth mentioning again, the Premier breached his own position on holding two sessions per year. It was the Premier who established the calendar that said that we would have a spring session where the primary business would be the budget and estimates and that we would have a fall session that would deal primarily with legislation.

As has been pointed out by my colleagues, there is legislation to deal with. There's legislation on the books. There's legislation in the orders of the day that we could have dealt with. It's not like there's nothing there to talk about.

But the Premier decided he would cancel that session, and he cancelled it because the government had no work to do. Of course, as we know and have heard many times over the last 14 hours, the Government House Leader, when he was questioned about why this decision was being made, said: "Well, you know, the Legislature tends to be busywork when the government doesn't have a program to put forward."

We've heard about a lot of the busywork here over the last 14 hours. We've heard about a lot of the busywork over the last number of days that we have been able to be here. Let's talk about some of the busywork. The busywork is important issues like.... My friend from Vancouver-Burrard often talks about this issue, and I know it's a very important issue for him — homelessness — as it is an important issue for members on this side of the House.

Homelessness is an extremely challenging issue. It's not an easy one to fix. It's one that local governments and the province are struggling with. Agencies are struggling with it. People who are advocates for the

homeless are struggling with it. This is a very challenging issue, and it's challenging because it's not an issue that sits out there on its own. It's an issue that is compounded by poverty. It's an issue that is often compounded by mental health questions. So it becomes extremely challenging.

We know that what loads on top of that oftentimes is that you have communities where you have increased property crime. You have challenges around community safety. You have the kinds of issues that we are reading about increasingly around panhandling — those kinds of issues. All of these issues weave together, and they are issues that are extremely challenging. They are issues that we should be dealing with in this House today, but we're not. They are issues that are not being addressed here. That's a big piece of the busywork that the Government House Leader talked about.

[0610]

We have issues around the forest sector, which my friend from Cariboo North spoke about. We know the huge challenges that we face around the beetle, but we also know there are even larger challenges generally around forest health. Those are challenges that are very complex and very difficult to deal with. They deal with the industry, and they deal with all of those communities that are forest-dependent. In five or six years from now, those communities are going to be in extremely desperate straits when that beetle wood is taken out unless there are substantive and workable programs in place to start to rebuild those communities' economic opportunities and economic futures.

Frankly, we don't see those programs in substantive ways today. Those decisions had better be made today in conjunction with those communities, working with the industries to figure out where those solutions and where those answers are, because if we don't do that, we're not going to be able to resolve those problems.

We know that global warming.... We've spoken a lot about global warming here over the last few days. Global warming is a huge challenge for us. Is it part of the busywork that we're not doing to begin to get our heads around those issues in substantive ways?

There is the survival of the mountain caribou. There are skills training issues that my friend on this side speaks about often. We need to deal with those issues. We do have a healthy economy today, but the challenge of the economy is having trained workers there, and it is an issue.

We have issues around education. I'll talk about that a little bit in a while, but my friend from Cariboo South talks about school closures in his school district. Well, I know in East Vancouver, I have schools that are on the verge of closing. There are pressures being put on school annexes. I've seen the reports that say that there are schools that will close in my constituency. There are schools that will close in Vancouver–Mount Pleasant. Those are being struggled with by the board today. It's very, very troubling.

The discussions have started to happen with parent advisory councils around those issues. They are around

enrolment questions, and we need to have that discussion in this place. We need to talk, particularly in those communities with vulnerable kids, about whether statistics and numbers are exclusively what it should be all about or whether there are broader issues in those schools that need to be addressed before those determinations are made.

We have issues related to that around vulnerable kids. We've heard here about child poverty levels in this province — almost one in four kids. We know that kids don't get poor by themselves. Poor kids are about poor families, and we're not talking about those issues here. We're not talking about them here, because this House isn't sitting. We don't have the opportunity to discuss them, because the government isn't being obliged to come forward and explain how they are going to address these issues.

Well, we also have questions around Olympic spending and management, and of course, the ever-challenging debate around health care and the future of health care. All of this, I guess, can be determined to be busywork, by the Government House Leader's definition. This side believes that these issues aren't busywork. This side believes that these are critical issues that need to be discussed in this place.

It's interesting. Over the last number of weeks while we have not been in this place, I've had the opportunity in different places to talk to a whole range of British Columbians when we've been travelling with the Aquaculture Committee or on other opportunities I've had to travel in the province or in the city of Vancouver. I got to talk to Conservatives and Greens and New Democrats and even B.C. Liberals. Everyone I've spoken to, without exception, has said that they believe that we should be here doing the business that we were elected to do. Every one of those people, without exception, does believe that we should have had a fall session — a full fall session.

I want to talk just for a few minutes about my constituency of Vancouver-Hastings. In Vancouver-Hastings I have many constituents who are looking for help from this government. I talked a little bit before about the statistics about vulnerable kids. We know that child poverty in this province runs about one in four kids. Well, in my constituency of Vancouver-Hastings the number is about one in two. About 48 percent, 49 percent of the kids in Vancouver-Hastings are deemed to be vulnerable — most of them living in poverty.

[0615]

I had the opportunity the other day, on the weekend, to attend a volunteer celebration held at the Grandview Baptist Church. It was a dinner. It's three or four churches in the community that work together and establish volunteer programs, mostly for poorer families, for street prostitutes, for people who are living with mental health issues, living on the street in East Vancouver. These churches do great work. They provide food programs, clothing programs, drop-ins and peer counselling programs — a whole array of programs, almost exclusively delivered by volunteers.

I had the opportunity to go and meet with over a hundred volunteers, have dinner with them — it was a great time — and speak with them. When I talked to the pastors of the churches, when I talked to people who were doing this work because it was the right thing for them to do, who were very committed to this, they all told me the same thing. Their work is important — they're working hard; they're happy to do the work — but they felt that the government of British Columbia wasn't holding up its end. They were happy as volunteers to be there doing what they did, and they didn't believe that government could do it all, but they didn't believe that government was holding up its end.

They weren't seeing the programs and the supports from the province that they needed to complement the work they were doing. They didn't see the supports from government that they believed, as people on the street doing work with folks who were living on the street, our vulnerable citizens.... They didn't see the supports that they felt would be the tipping point to allow a number of those people to put the pieces back together in their lives.

That's what they said to me. They said: "Go do your job. Go to Victoria, and demand of the government that they do more, that they provide some of that wealth that we have in British Columbia to the people who need it the most."

I mentioned a number of schools in my constituency that are at risk of closure. Most of them are annexes. They're smaller schools; they're the annexes of the elementary schools. But they're at risk of closure — Maquinna, a number of those schools. They also have lost valuable staff and resources.

I want to talk about one school in particular: Macdonald School. Macdonald School is a school in my constituency. It's probably about half aboriginal kids. I suspect that, along with maybe Grandview School in the member for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant's constituency, these may be the two poorest schools in the city in terms of the poverty levels of the people whose kids attend those schools.

There are huge problems around literacy at Macdonald School, especially with young first nations kids. The school got to working together. They worked together with the Urban Native Youth Association and with Watari, which is another organization in the community. They were able to bring in some cultural work along with some tutoring work, and they began to deal with literacy issues.

I talked to the principal of the school, and over the last year we've seen literacy increasing among the young aboriginal kids in the school. We also saw the parents beginning to accomplish things, working together to build an improved playground which they were very involved in. They were very excited about their contribution to that, about their ability to build in their school and do positive things.

But what's happening — because, again, it's enrolment questions.... In that school which has unique challenges for these kids, some of the most vulnerable kids in our city, we've seen a reduction now in those

staffing levels because of reduced dollars going into those schools because of enrolment issues. That school is still pretty well-resourced, but what we've seen is the loss of the key staff time in the library that coordinated those programs around literacy.

[0620]

As a result of that, we're not going to see the same level of tutoring. The tutoring will go to about 25 percent of what it was for these young aboriginal kids. We're going to see these kids start to fall by the wayside again. I'm sure nobody in this place wants that to occur, but that's the reality of what will happen, and because we're not going to get to talk about that in this place, it's going to be extremely difficult to resolve those issues.

Health care. We know we've had lots of discussions around health care in this place and around the commercialization of health care. Maybe a month or so ago I had a Mr. Murray Gedde come to see me. Mr. Gedde is an older gentleman. He's on income assistance — PWD. He lives with disabilities. He approached my office in mid-October. His doctor had retired, so he went to find another doctor. He did find another doctor. But when he went to the doctor and got himself set up with the doctor.... When the doctor went to get his files, he finds out, of course, that all of these files rest with a file management company.

Mr. Gedde has been told that he will either have to pay \$41.50 to get his files sometime in the future or pay \$141.50 to get his files expedited. Mr. Gedde lives on income assistance with a disability. He can't afford it. So what he did is go to the ministry. He went and asked the ministry if they would cover the fee. On October 23 the ministry came back and said no, they wouldn't.

We were able in my office to negotiate that fee with the company down to \$15, and Mr. Gedde is going to have to pay that, but I think that we should be discussing that matter here. I think that I should have the opportunity to ask, first, the Minister of Health whether he thinks that this is appropriate for these kinds of fees to be charged and, then, the Minister of Employment and Income Assistance whether he thinks that people on assistance should have to pay these fees when they are created through no fault of their own. But I'm not going to have the opportunity to do that.

J. Horgan: We'll never know.

S. Simpson: We'll never know about that.

There are issues as well in my critic area that I think are pretty important and that we need to deal with. We've talked a lot about global warming here. We are not having that discussion. The government's plans are not adequate in the area of global warning. The climate change action plan does not have targets. We're not having the opportunity to have that discussion in this place. We called for a special legislative committee to deal with global warming issues, but we are not going to have the opportunity to put that issue on the floor of this chamber.

The mountain caribou is a very important issue for people concerned about species at risk. What do we know? We know there is a science panel report. That report is very clear. It talks about how to save the 11 herds of mountain caribou. It talks about how to save those five small herds by supplementing the herds by moving animals from the larger herds to the small ones.

This seems like a reasonable idea to explore, but the minister responsible, the Minister of Agriculture and Lands, when he was releasing this information with a PowerPoint, talked about killing off the five small herds and moving those animals into the large herds. That's the minister's solution. I'd like to have the opportunity to talk to the Minister of Agriculture and Lands about whether he meant what he said or he just misspoke. I'd like to have the opportunity to know whether he actually believes that killing off five herds of mountain caribou is okay. But I guess I'm not going to have that opportunity till at least February.

We have park issues. We know that the government wants to commercialize our parks, put lodges and resorts in our parks. I'd love to have the opportunity to talk about how that's going, because we know that most of those plans have fallen by the wayside because there aren't very many entrepreneurs interested. I'd like to know if the Minister of Environment could acknowledge that this was not a very smart plan and that they messed it up and that they're backing away. I'd love to give the Minister of Environment the opportunity to tell us that, but I guess that's not going to happen.

[0625]

One of the other issues is the Cheakamus River. We had a long struggle in this House to get a limited hatchery enhancement plan in place to try to recover the steelhead on the Cheakamus River. That was finally reluctantly agreed to by the Minister of Environment. We have now been told that there are 37,000 fish fry sitting in that hatchery and that the government plans to release only 20,000 and essentially dispose of the other 17,000 and not release them.

I'd like the minister to explain to this House why that decision is being taken at a time when the most recent report says that this river borders on being sterile and needs a massive amount of help if it's going to recover.

These are all issues that we should be speaking about. But you know, Mr. Speaker, the bottom line is this. This place does not belong to those of us who are privileged to sit here so much as it belongs to the people of B.C. It doesn't belong to the Premier. It doesn't belong to the B.C. Liberals. It belongs to the people of British Columbia. This place is the people's place, and every one of the 79 of us who are here.... We have a right, an obligation and a great privilege to be here to speak about the issues that are important to British Columbians.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Member.

S. Simpson: I would like to have that opportunity, Mr. Speaker, and I'd like to have it in a session this fall.

D. Cubberley: I rise at this late or, I guess, really early hour — but for some of us a very late hour — to comment on the necessity of continuing the regular sitting of this House and try to persuade the members opposite to allow it to run its course through to the end of November 30. While it's a struggle for members on this side to do that, there's also genuine conviction on our part that that's the minimum required in order to keep faith with the public — with all British Columbians — and to meet government's obligation to subject itself to scrutiny.

It's a very difficult thing to do. I know there's a strong temptation on the part of any government to try to withdraw from scrutiny and get on with the business of governing. But it's in the nature of the business that the opposition has an important role to play in democratic government.

In a sense, it's something that the current government saw in a strange way back in 2001 when it made a commitment to the people of B.C. to establish what it then called the most open, transparent and accountable government in Canada. I was thinking about how important a commitment to the public that is and what a precursor that was of the five great goals that we now have for British Columbia and how strangely absent it is from those five great goals, given that it was a goal that government would apply directly to itself.

Openness in government operations some people would say is oxymoronic, but I think that from the public's point of view it's a highly desirable trait and that electors have an interest in seeing governments work to try to become more open in what they do. It's often talked about, but it's rarely carried out in office.

Transparency. The goal of becoming transparent to the public would set an ultra-high standard. That standard would require any government of any stripe to stretch in the direction of patience and show willingness to be scrutinized, whether it's in the Legislature, in the nature of the documents that are released for public debate or for the public to review, or in the access that's given to the public to government's own deliberative processes.

Accountable. Now, accountable would mean a government that's willing to submit its proposals and priorities to close and ongoing scrutiny and to formulate its direction with honest efforts to meet sustained criticism of their inadequacies.

When this was promised back in 2001 — we heard it in the run-up to the election, and then it was formalized as part of the platform — it was indeed a significant promise. If I can quote, one of the documents of the time said: "If government followed this approach to become open, transparent and accountable, you may not always agree with its decisions, but you would always know how those decisions were made."

[0630]

As was said at the time, to those who were advocates of open government these words were pure music. The platform documents went so far as to acknowledge that an open government policy would even

prove annoying at times to the government. "We know this transparency will not be without political embarrassments, but we believe government should not shirk from making tough decisions in public. It's time to put the public interest ahead of partisan interests."

Time to put the public interest ahead of partisan interests — those were brave words. It was a significant statement. It was arguably a new departure in British Columbia and indeed in Canada for a government to say it wanted to operate in that manner. Unfortunately, it was one that the fledgling government of that day had absolutely no intention of trying to keep.

The wheels came off that promise early on, almost immediately — indeed, really, from the moment that the 77 seats fell under the Premier's control. He moved unilaterally to deny opposition status and resources to the two non-government members in the House. That was a very, very significant act. It showed a massive disrespect for the parliamentary tradition over which the Premier had custody.

We see that continuing today, where there is a lack of recognition of the important role that facing the opposition plays in the scrutiny of issues, which performs an important service on behalf of democracy. We see that continuing with the refusal to allow the scheduled sitting of this House.

Such a complete reversal of promise into practice set a tone and a course of unilateralism for the new government, which has only intensified with time. How bad was it for a new government to refuse to recognize an opposition when it desperately needed one to play an integral role in meeting its own promise of accountability? Well, it contradicted the entire Westminster tradition of government, which gives opposition exactly that role on behalf of Her Majesty in every Legislature, and it broke its public trust at the same time.

It's absolutely the case that the less scrutiny there is of a governing body, the more prone it is to performing badly and falling into bad habits. By bad habits, I mean governing without debate and without an obligation to respond to strong arguments against particular policy choices. That's the way in which things get framed for the public — the way in which in the noisy battle and ongoing struggle of democracy, people come to understand the difference in positions and see the implications of particular policy positions.

Yesterday we unanimously endorsed a resolution filling a re-created children's commissioner position, an office that had been argued for strenuously by our Premier while he was Leader of the Opposition, and one of the first positions to be axed under the misguided policies of a government with a huge majority bent on renegeing on promises of accountability.

The 2005 election installed a 33-member opposition on this side of the House, in large part because the public was dead set against four more years of unchecked unilateralism by a government that, as a senior pundit recently noted, goes out of its way to avoid public scrutiny and accountability. That's the wrap on the government in the chattering class.

For our part on this side, and perhaps naively, we had imagined that government's reforms of the Legislature — some of which are quite progressive and which involved a trade-off of a fixed legislative session in return for some tolerance of a power of closure by government — would prevail as a package.

[0635]

But I think the government — the Premier, to be more accurate, because let's face it; it really is a one-man show — felt such a strong urge to govern without having to answer questions and face scrutiny and such a preference for leading orchestrated public relations exercises without the potential for messy interventions and scrambling correction by a daily questioning in the House in question period that he conceived the idea of simply not having a fall session at all. He was too busy doing all of the things that he had avoided talking about during the election campaign, like privatizing health care, to bother with noisy allegations here in the House.

He didn't want to risk those priorities being exposed on a daily basis, queried here in the House and then pilloried in the press following question period. He preferred a field that was wide-open to his own interventions without scrutiny except, occasionally, incidentally but then only as a minority party grousing in one or two lines in stories that he essentially controlled, released on his own time lines.

That attempt to circumvent scrutiny, avoid acting transparently and side-step accountability is what accounts for the strength of feeling on this side of the House about the necessity of a fall legislative session to canvass issues of pressing importance. It's not a question of whether the government is ready to legislate or not, although it has introduced bills on the order paper. They could be completed in a session, and more could have been done by way of new business if government had cared to suss out what might have been supported on both sides of the House.

We certainly would have welcomed something along the lines of a return to leadership on tobacco control. I would have been very happy to work with members opposite on designing a system that might have helped the government meet its own modest goals to reduce the rate of addiction to tobacco and rate of smoking in British Columbia by 2010 — something that it does risk not doing without bringing a strategy into play.

It's rather a matter of there being pressing business that requires the attention of the whole House, business which you've heard over the last number of hours canvassed both on the basis of the implications for all British Columbians and in the way that it plays in particular constituencies, issues which in some cases are tearing up British Columbia's communities and that government should be pressed forcefully, daily, to address — issues like homelessness. And it really does come home to us now, at a time when temperatures are freezing.

I could get into a description of those issues in my own constituency, but I think I might be going over

some ground that you've heard from others. I live in a suburban constituency, which is subject to all of the same stresses and pressures that other suburban constituencies are. I won't do that. I won't list those things.

I simply want to register the point that if government has no ideas for what it should be doing at this point in time, we certainly do. And we're happy to provide those ideas. We want to meet, and we want to talk about pressing issues. There is absolutely no doubt that in the weather we're having, there are people who are dying on our streets. There is also absolutely no doubt that we could put plans in place that would change that reality, save those people and prevent large numbers of people from having to live on our streets.

All it would take is action — concerted action and agreement in this House. Were this government to care to take on that issue, members on this side would be happy to work in concert to achieve that on behalf of British Columbia's most vulnerable citizens. But that might appear to be busywork to some.

In talking about pressing issues, it's certainly possible that we may not always agree. Certainly, it's happened before that we don't agree, but there is precedent for us from time to time coming to a common view. Whether we do or don't, the airing of issues is healthy. It's integral to democracy, and the lack of it bothers people of all political stripes, as my colleague said previously.

When a motion to adjourn is brought into this House, it signals that a full and complete hearing of issues has occurred. Or else why do it prior to the end of the period allocated, having begun so late in the calendar? Such is sadly not the case. Indeed, the only airings enabled here are as a result of our forcing a couple of additional question periods on the government as the price of calling us back here for the sole purpose of dealing with a single motion.

We undertook that prolonging consciously in order to remind government that this House is not a public convenience for the private use of the executive, that it's the parliament, that it's all of the members. It's not simply the government majority to whom it belongs and upon whom the responsibility of reasonable conduct, due care and attention to public business falls. It falls upon all of us.

[0640]

Each of us has an interest in ensuring and participating in scrutiny of the executive and the Premier's actions. Even members opposite should be so engaged.

Mr. Speaker, with that, I'm going to close my comments and, with your permission, will cede the floor to another of my colleagues.

M. Karagianis: Here we are, as the new day dawns, at quarter to seven in the morning. We're probably now greeting all kinds of new viewers and enthusiasts to the parliamentary system here — she says, tongue in cheek.

Like my colleagues, I rise here to speak to this motion to adjourn. First of all, I'd like to say a special

thanks to all the staff for not only staying here but doing it with such good cheer and such good grace. You've all maintained your sense of humour and your courtesy to all of us, and it's greatly appreciated because we know we've kept you all night.

Secondly, I'd like to add how very impressed I've been with all of my colleagues here during this debate through the night. Not only have my fellow members here been profound and wise, they've also been very funny and delivered very serious messages with a sense of humour and a sense of compassion. That's always a really easy way to sell a message. In fact, they reminded me of many things that I had forgotten, like the promise of open, televised cabinet meetings. I look forward, actually, to resuscitating that promise and plan here.

But I do stand to oppose this motion to adjourn, and I'm going to use a word that in fact the Government House Leader uses often because this process we're going through right now vexes me — vexes me very much. I think it vexes all of us on this side of the House. On behalf of my constituents, we have been waiting all summer and into the fall for an opportunity to bring forward issues to this House that we would like to see debated and that the members of my community feel are really important.

The member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca addressed one of them earlier in his remarks as well, which is the motion that's on the paper regarding protocols and a program for preserving and protecting archaeological sites. Here on the south Island we have numerous sites that have become issues of public debate, of public scrutiny, which in some cases have become confrontational and highly political. It's unfortunate that we have not had a chance here in the House to debate what I felt and believed to be a very good motion, a very good action for protocol to be established with local communities. In fact, the motion was originally put forward because of issues occurring in View Royal around the destruction of a midden and the discovery of human remains there and some efforts to try and protect that.

It was perfect timing because of the issues that have occurred up on Skirt Mountain, known in the common vernacular as Bear Mountain. But in fact it's called Skirt Mountain. I know those issues still remain unresolved here in the community. On behalf of the first nations communities of Songhees and Esquimalt, who share the most concern for this, this would have been an issue that I would like to have debated in the House and perhaps found some solutions here in the appropriate precinct.

I also know that the standing committee on aboriginal relations, the all-party committee, has never been activated in this House. In fact, that would be one other action that I would urge this House to take on. Certainly, that would have been a piece of business to discuss here. Should the government determine to retract this motion to adjourn, then that is one topic that, clearly, I would very much like to see us discuss before the end of this legislated session on the 30th of November.

[0645]

Another topic that is of great concern to my constituents, which is a fairly recent topic the Premier has introduced some nuances to, is sewage treatment funding here on the south Island. This has been a topic that has been an ongoing concern for the communities and municipalities here for as long as I have been in local government, and now as an MLA. It has been something that the communities have waited with great anticipation to have both federal and provincial participation in, but when the provincial participation arrived, it came with a deal-breaking condition.

The Premier, despite local sentiment to the contrary, has stipulated that there must be consideration of a public-private partnership for this. I would agree with the mayor of Saanich, who publicly has said that this community will not support a P3 sewage treatment system because, in fact, the municipal financing authority can borrow cheaper and build cheaper. Local government can maintain sewage treatment, and the responsibility is in their hands.

Again, this is a topic around the conditions of the funding coming tied to a P3 model, which I think is deserving of debate here in the House. I regret that we have not had a chance to debate this earlier. This was presented at the UBCM. It has been a huge topic of concern for all the communities within my constituency and is a topic that I'd very much like to see us discuss and debate here in the House.

A topic that is always of great concern to us here on the south Island is transportation infrastructure investment. It is a growing concern for us here on the Island. The member for Malahat-Juan de Fuca and I share this as a really core need in our municipalities and communities in our constituencies. Yet we haven't seen any government investment in infrastructure here, in those very needed transportation solutions like light rail and expansion of the multi-use trail — topics that we would very much like to have addressed here either through question period or in other forms of debate.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

Homelessness. I know that everyone tonight, in one way or another, has almost touched on the topic of homelessness. Recently I did a ride-around with the police here in the south Island, looking at solutions for shelter — for cold-weather shelter, for emergency shelter. In the process of that, I talked to the homeless in our community and realized that there are a whole number of other issues that we could very easily be exploring and debating here.

AIDS Vancouver Island has become the central clearinghouse for most of the addicted homeless here in Greater Victoria. This is an agency that had its resources cut in half by this government, and as a consequence we have seen an explosion of concern around addictions and the behaviours of the homeless and the addicted on the streets of Greater Victoria. This is a topic that we could clearly have a great deal of discussion on here in this House, were we to be sitting with an appropriate fall session.

Poverty is a growing concern. Unlike some of my fellow colleagues who have some of the poorest communities in the province, I only have the concern of having the poorest community in the Greater Victoria area. In fact, the statistic of one in every four children living in poverty is directly reflected by the demographic within my constituency. I would like to sit in this House and look at plans to try and resolve poverty and to have a declaration to ensure that we do not have the highest level of child poverty in Canada, that we find a way to resolve poverty and make a commitment to abolish poverty here in this province. It's another great topic for discussion here in the House.

Climate change. We've had numerous local forums lately on climate change. Sadly, only members of the opposition have attended those sessions and sat in and discussed it with scientists, with university scholars, around looking at solutions and ideas to move forward to look at climate change and some resolutions there. It's a topic that we could clearly address here.

[0650]

In fact, many of those scholars that we've discussed had hopes that we'd be able to bring that topic to the floor in the Legislature. Without these remaining days at our disposal, there is very little opportunity for us to be able to make good on their desires to see those topics discussed here.

Those are only a few of the issues that concern my constituency directly. When it comes to my critic role, there is a much larger list of concerns that could be debated here. I will list a couple of them, only those that I think are of the most urgent importance. We recently saw a report, the Morley report on the Coroners Service and the Jamie Charlie situation. A number of issues are still there to be resolved around the Coroners Service, a number of issues that we could be raising here in question period had we more opportunity to do that, and a number of issues that I think need ongoing attention from government.

Also under MCFD there are growing concerns around the ailing foster care system. A couple that I know from up-Island named the Pogrows are currently taking care of their granddaughter. I emphasize "granddaughter." This is a couple who are not young any longer, but they are now the primary caregivers for their granddaughter.

They actually need support systems. They need funding for their granddaughter, but instead they are being confined because the child lives in the home of a relative. They are not receiving the same kind of funding that they would if it were a simple fostering situation. They have some grave concerns and some needs that are not being met. I would like to be able to bring their case and their story forward for debate here in the House — bring it up in question period and see whether or not we could get some resolutions to their issues.

Community Living B.C. It's an ailing system that is having huge challenges every single day. Clients phone my office every single day who, in fact, are not just my constituents but the constituents of other members in

this House, seeking some kind of assistance with the problems that are being faced by Community Living B.C.

Another recent Jane Morley report on FASD has a whole series of recommendations that pertain very directly to some of these issues in Community Living and elsewhere. I would like to have an opportunity here to debate with government the implementation of those recommendations, to see the government take FASD and begin to implement a number of the things that were recommended in the most recent report there. Again, we'll not have a chance to discuss that, because we have not been able to avail ourselves of the number of question periods and a number of other options here in this House.

I talked earlier yesterday, in welcoming the new appointee as the children's representative, about some of the other concerns I have, like the freeze on medical supplies, on behalf of Cathy Grant. She is a young woman who is living with extreme cerebral palsy, a fairly debilitating condition, but is managing to live a very productive and healthy and happy life. She does occasionally need some medical support systems and, in fact, has recently been denied some of those medical supplies that she so vitally needs. She was told there was a freeze on those supplies. We've had to go and fight very hard on her behalf with Community Living B.C.

It concerns me greatly that again and again we hear these stories of a freeze on necessary medical supplies to people who are trying to live productive and full lives with minimal support and yet are being told that the funding has run out at Community Living B.C. There are some grave concerns there, and I would love more opportunities to raise those in this House.

[0655]

Harvey Blondeau is another individual who contacted my office. I've talked with Harvey. Harvey has concerns about who's going to take care of his daughter. He has a daughter who's in her 30s and is living with a developmental disability right now. Harvey, who is 80 years old, finds that he is no longer able to lift his daughter and give her the care she needs, so Harvey has come to CLBC looking for respite care.

Unfortunately, he's been turned away because CLBC, as with their other list of funding freezes, has said they don't have enough money to offer him respite care. So Harvey is very frustrated, at the age of 80, by how he'll continue to look after his daughter. In fact, he worries about the long-term care of his daughter.

Harvey is like many, many individuals who have, in fact, taken over the care of their children and have been the primary caregivers through most of their children's lives. Now as they age and become more frail, they're very concerned about the long-term safety and support for their children.

The Manningtons are another couple from Greater Vancouver who have a daughter with severe autism, and all they're asking for is a residential group home for their daughter. But in fact, they've been denied that kind of support system for their daughter by Commu-

nity Living B.C. They've been told, in fact, that they're discouraging group homes for the developmentally challenged or for people living with autism. Instead, they're encouraging individual residential care. Well, the Manningtons know their daughter Dawn very well, and she would not do well in an individual residential situation. Dawn needs support 24 hours a day, every day, in order to live any kind of quality life.

Jan Morrison-Hines. I talked about Jan yesterday when I was, again, talking about the new appointee for the children's representative. I'll bring the story up again, because I can't emphasize strongly enough the kind of bravery that families like the Morrison-Hines live with in taking care of their 14-year-old autistic son and looking after all his personal needs, including diapering him throughout the day. This is a family who has been denied adequate diapers for their son through the At Home care program.

Again it comes to my mind. What kind of government and what kind of province do we have when people are denied such vital, simple medical supplies as the appropriate numbers of diapers for their child? So for all of the families — for Harvey Blondeau at 80; for the Manningtons, looking for a group home for their daughter; for Jan Morrison-Hines, who is living very bravely looking after her son and being short-changed by the government; for Cathy Grant, who has been denied medical supplies so that she can continue to live a productive life — I have to ask: what kind of government do we have that would put these people into such mean-spirited situations?

These things I would like to be able to debate in this House, and I would like answers for all of these people. I would like satisfactory resolutions to these issues for all of these families, and for all the other families who are aging while they care for their adult children, who are being denied medical supplies and who cannot live a quality, dignified and productive life because small support systems have been denied them in the most petty and mean-spirited kind of way.

On behalf of the Stó:lō tribal council, who also wanted their issues raised here in this House and wanted a satisfactory resolution of their concerns.... This is a group of people who have petitioned government for months and months to meet with them and to resolve the issues they have and the concerns they have for the political split in their community, for the transition of responsibilities for child care and for what they feel is a lack of leadership on the part of government in helping to resolve their issues.

That is a situation and an issue that we should be debating here in the House, but unfortunately, we are unable to do that. I do have dozens of other individuals who have called, written and e-mailed not me alone but also the Minister of Children and Family Development, the Premier and their member of the Legislative Assembly who sits in this House.

[0700]

For all of those people, I think that they deserve better than what we have delivered to them here. We've shortchanged them on their opportunity to have

access to the democratic legislative process here, to the parliamentary process. We've shortchanged them.

In fact, the whole process here of forcing us to debate through the night, looking for some kind of democratic opportunities for all of these people, all of our constituents, seems to me to be an insult to the people of British Columbia. So I will not be supporting a motion to adjourn this House. I think we are in complete violation of everything this House stands for. We should have had a fall session. We should definitely sit until the last day of the legislative calendar, because it's what the public expects. It's what they deserve. So I will oppose this.

K. Conroy: I, too, rise to speak against this motion to adjourn, as I also have many issues in my constituency that should have been dealt with in this House this fall — issues that are critical to my constituents, and issues that constituents want addressed.

I was elected to be a voice for the people of West Kootenay-Boundary, elected to be here to ensure that their issues are heard. I take that responsibility seriously. I heard from many residents who were appalled at the arrogance of this government, the arrogance of a Premier who felt that this House did not need to sit and that their issues were what has been referred to as busywork.

Some of these issues I'm going to talk about, and some I'm not because they've been canvassed thoroughly by my colleagues throughout the night. I want to ensure that for a brief time this fall, issues will be heard in this House that directly affect the people in West Kootenay-Boundary.

Health care is such a volatile topic in our region, and as seniors critic I feel an even greater affinity to what is happening. I watch and hear, from so many people across the province, the issues, the concerns and the apprehension for the future of their parents and relatives.

I met with a group in Fort St. John with the acronym SONSS, which means Save Our Northern Seniors Society, a group who said to me that they have a number of goals. They have issues with long-term care beds up in the North Peace; they need more of them. They're advocating for community members who are sent to other facilities, to try to get them to stay in the Fort St. John area. They want seniors to live there in their own communities, to have dignity, respect, freedom and no fear of being separated from their own families.

People up in Fort St. John are asking for these services. They're also asking for home support. I read with a great deal of pleasure of this home support campaign that's been put on out in the province by the B.C. Health Coalition. I think all members of this Legislature should look at this campaign and support it. It details the issues that we're dealing with in this province and that we're facing with home support, the cuts that have been made to home support and the struggles that people are facing. We need to support this, because home support is a cost-effective, efficient way of providing health care services to our seniors, and it's something that we really need to push in this province.

I feel the issues that are being dealt with by seniors. I feel it even more so in my own constituency as I am continually reminded of what happened last February to shock people into reality. As we all know only too well, the tragic circumstances of Fanny and Alfie Albo did just that. It shocked people into action. Since then I've listened to and read letters and e-mails from the many people in our region who've expressed concerns about seniors services. I have met with groups and individuals who have shared stories, anxieties and solutions for what needs to happen, and I've watched the responses.

One of the positive consequences of what happened last February was the bringing together of like-minded people in the region, people who are working together to ensure that other seniors and their families don't suffer in the same way. Working together are those who worked in the health care field and are now retired, those who still work in the health care system, family members of the Albos and community members who care about what happens in their community.

Collectively, these people have collaborated to put forth a plan for positive change, a plan that incorporates input from throughout the region and that talks about what we need to do to make services work for seniors in our communities. I have read through a report that was compiled by this group calling themselves the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Seniors.

[0705]

It's odd that in this province we need organizations that have these kinds of acronyms, these kinds of names — Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Seniors, Save Our Northern Seniors Society. It shocks me and it appals me that we need these kinds of services, but I'm glad these people are dedicated to doing this.

The report they wrote delighted me with the sophisticated simplicity of what they were proposing — solutions that make sense, that say not only can we provide the services missing in our community, but we can also do it in a cost-effective, efficient manner. These dedicated citizens have proposed a centre for care that not only will ensure that the needs of seniors in this area are dealt with, but it will also be done in a humane, caring way while opening a facility that was shut down by the Interior Health Authority and this government.

The question now is: will the IHA management actually read this report and give it the respectable assessment it deserves? Will they look at a proposal that is cost-effective and meets the needs of the community when it comes from ordinary people and not from some high-cost consultant from out of the area, which is what has happened to date? Will they see the proposals in the report as an efficient manner in which to provide services in a compassionate and considerate way?

My fear is that the management of the Interior Health Authority has bought into what this government's vision is — the vision that private is better than public and that seniors services should be delivered by private operators and not the public system. It doesn't

matter how cost-effective or sound the SPCS proposal is. It won't get the time of day because they are recommending a public system of care and not a private one, something this government has been forcing on people in this province for far too long.

Today I have learned that in fact the IHA isn't even interested in this proposal. They are not interested in a full continuum of care. They seem only to care about the costs of the project and not about what the cost is of not providing services to seniors in our region.

This government needs to step in and correct the mistakes they have made. They need to let the health authorities know that they indeed did make a mistake, that they should not have put finances before seniors care, that they should not be downloading seniors services onto the backs of seniors and that they should not be absolving themselves of all responsibilities when it comes to providing publicly funded services in this province.

It is wrong that this government is using a formula for residential care beds for seniors that is one of the lowest in Canada. It's wrong that seniors and their families are struggling to ensure that when they need the proper care, it can be assessed. It is wrong not to allow people of this province to have the opportunity to have their concerns heard in this House, and that is one of the reasons I am speaking against this motion.

There is a need to talk about other issues that have been raised in the Legislature, and one of these is air quality in the Grand Forks area.

I have received numerous calls, e-mails, pictures, letters and expressions of concern from people in the area related to the air quality and, more specifically, to the level of concentrations or particulate matter. From these discussions it is my understanding that Grand Forks has some of the worst air quality in the province. In large part this is due to the high levels of the particulate matter called 2.5 found in the air. This particular form of pollution is very invasive and toxic to young children, seniors or anyone asthmatic or at risk.

I know that there is a concerted effort on behalf of the community to deal with this significant problem. The citizens of the community have banded together to try to deal with it, but they have also felt that their issues are being ignored. They feel that the cuts to the Ministry of Environment have put their efforts at risk. They have finally got in a system to measure the air quality, and the ministry can't put people in to work on the weekends to ensure that the people know what the air quality is like.

We have people with young children who want to play outside, seniors who want to go for a walk, and they have no way of accessing the information because of the cuts to the ministry. This needs to be dealt with in this House. It's an issue that we need to bring to the floor to discuss with the Ministry of Environment.

The people in the community are tired of being left out when it comes to dealing with this. There is no way a beautiful little community like Grand Forks should have the worst air quality in this province, some of the worst air quality in the country. We need to ensure the

government does more to make sure that these kids in the community can get out and play, that the medically fragile residents can go for a walk, and we need to make sure these issues are dealt with quickly.

[0710]

Government needs to come to the table. It needs to be a contributing partner when environmental issues are such as the ones we are facing. It needs to ensure that there is support for industries to make them environmentally sound. In order to make a change with the global environmental concerns we face today, we need to first begin with these issues close to home.

One of the goals the Premier often talks about is that B.C. should have the best air quality in the world. The demand from the citizens of Grand Forks is that this issue needs to be dealt with and dealt with now. I think we should all call on the government to ensure that the goal of the best air quality is met, something that we could have done if the House had been meeting this year.

A final issue that I want to raise, and I would have raised if the House had been sitting, is talking about an issue that's affecting our children and, for some of us, our grandchildren. This is a crisis parents are facing in accessing quality, licensed child care.

Never in all the years that I worked in that field has there been such a waiting list across the province. In my region alone the numbers in most communities, small communities, are anywhere from 25 to 50 children waiting for infant care — care these parents are being told they're never going to get. These children are going to grow up before they'll ever access the proper care that the parents need.

There is a shortage of trained caregivers. Who wants to work for what this government has cut the wages to — wages that after you go to school, get your training and then go to work in the education sector and make twice the wages and have benefits that have been cut out of this sector...? The cuts to the operating grants have traumatized the sector, and this government has done nothing but platitudes and empty announcements — announcements that should be debated in this House, announcements that the minister should be challenged on.

We have parents that have no support who are struggling to make ends meet, struggling to go to work, to go to school. They just want to ensure that their children are getting the care that they need — care by licensed, early childhood educators who are trained to work with young children when they have the greatest opportunity to learn.

All studies show that young children need the best possible care in those early years — that they are most critical then — and we need to ensure that this government steps up to the plate and makes sure the children can access those services they so desperately need.

The cuts that come to the operating grants will leave facilities struggling, parents' fees rising and centres closing. This government needs to act now to deal with this travesty for our children and their children.

Other issues are uranium mining. We have entire communities calling on this government to not enter any kind of engagement with uranium mining.

We have forestry closures, mill closures. We have students who are struggling with college tuition fees, and we have highway maintenance issues. As was discussed by my colleague from Cariboo North, the highway maintenance issues are huge. We have ten-year contracts for contractors who cannot provide the services that we need. In these last few days we've had more calls around highway issues than we had all of last year. We've had issues around Bill 33 too. We've got school trustees that are struggling.

I can go on and on and on. But seeing as we've been talking about issues for quite some time now, and when I look at the clock and realize that I've been here for over 24 hours, I think it's time that we carried on.... I'll have the Speaker know — because he said that if he heard the member for Nelson-Creston sing that he might shut down the debate — that last time we had this debate, I dozed off. The member for Nelson-Creston sang, and the power went out. So I promised myself I'd stay awake this time.

With this, I also am speaking against this objectionable motion. I'm glad that all my colleagues got up and made sure that they expressed their objections to this motion, and for that reason, I will not be supporting it.

A. Dix: Thank you to my colleagues, colleagues across the way. I think it's a good moment, at this moment in the debate, where we've reached almost the halfway point of the debate, to note to the Table Officers and to the Chair that I am the designated speaker for the opposition on this motion. I wanted to take the opportunity to make a few points in the debate today, which I think are pertinent.

[0715]

First of all, I think what we've seen in this legislative session, short as it has been, is a government fundamentally without an agenda but worse, I think, a government without the necessary respect for our institutions of parliamentary democracy. We've heard the Government House Leader, aside from his decisions on Wednesday, then on Thursday, then on Monday to frustrate the ordinary schedule of the House, to deny members the opportunity to raise debates and to raise bills and issues that have been legitimately placed on the order paper. We've seen a government that I think has shown disrespect for even its own institutional reforms. I want to speak in particular to the fixed parliamentary calendar.

The fixed parliamentary calendar is in place in British Columbia in order, one would argue, to provide certainty to members of the Legislature. It is not in place to systematically shorten the opportunity MLAs have to raise issues on behalf of their constituency. It is not in place for that reason. I want to note that if you look at the total number of days that we will have sat in this calendar year, this will in fact be dramatically shorter than any other calendar year in recent memory

that was not an election year. Historically, in fact, election years tend to have fewer sitting days, for obvious reasons. But other than that, you see dramatically fewer.

Let's just make some of the comparisons from previous years: in 1992, 111 days; 1993, 90 days; but even 2002-2003, 71 and 74 days. This year we will be sitting 46 days, and we're sitting 46 days because the government made choices in this regard.

I want to say that the reverse, the other side.... When you don't respect the parliamentary calendar that you have set, that you have put in legislation, that you protect by giving the government, really, the systematic authority to do something that has been rarely used in British Columbia — the tool of closure, which this government has used again and again over the years....

Without respect for the parliamentary calendar that this government set, that reform, that establishment of a fixed parliamentary calendar, has no meaning. It has no meaning if you don't follow the rules that you set. If you set up a rule that merely says that you can ram everything through in a very short session in relative terms in the spring and then don't respect your own parliamentary calendar, then it has no meaning.

You know, the irony of it is that this is their reform that they're disrespecting. They don't just disrespect the opposition. They don't just disrespect the people. They don't just disrespect independent officers of the Legislature. They disrespect their own reforms. That is what this debate has symbolized: the disrespect of this government for the institutions of democracy in British Columbia.

We've had some clues in recent times: when you see a government so fundamentally disrespect accountability. This is the government which, for the first time in the history of the Office of the Auditor General, chose to impose its own candidate for Auditor General. This is the government that as a matter of course doesn't follow the law with respect to freedom of information. This is the government that, of course — and this is one of the reasons that they've been forced back here, the sole reason, their one item of debate — got rid of not just the independent children's commissioner but other independent officers of this Legislature. This is the government that has shown enormous disrespect for accountability.

[0720]

One would have thought that that disrespect might have been shaken by May 17, 2005, but they seem only encouraged. They seem only encouraged, and that's why I think it is so important that members of the House, members of the opposition have risen in debate in opposition to a government that disrespects this place so fundamentally.

One of the aspects and one of the things that's important.... The Government House Leader repeatedly got up this week, and I think he said three times: "I set the agenda for the House. I decide. If I say it's going to be a one-day session on one subject, then that's the way it is." He said this repeatedly with respect to requests

for emergency debate. He said it repeatedly over the last few days.

Well, hon. Speaker, we all know it is not the Government House Leader or the executive council that decides, in a parliamentary democracy, the agenda of the Legislature. That's something that the Legislature does. The Government House Leader in fact has special roles and responsibilities, as you would expect. He's leading the majority in the Legislature. He has agenda-setting roles for much of the time, but he doesn't have agenda-setting roles for all of the time.

One of the most fundamental reforms of parliament in British Columbia that have taken place took place when Dave Barrett was Premier, and we brought question period to this House. The fact that we have a government that has dramatically reduced the number of question periods this year has denied the opportunity for the people of British Columbia to have questions answered all fall. We've raised these questions. You've heard them from my colleagues in debate over the last 24 hours — the kinds of issues and questions that the people of British Columbia are legitimately asking. It's not just people who oppose or disagree with the government on its agenda, but all British Columbians.

I want to talk about some of those issues during my presentation today, with respect to health care in particular. I want to start by putting it in a broader frame of what's happening in our province today. What we see happening in our province, I think, is something quite unusual. It's quite disconcerting. Some of it, in fact, is directly related to government policy.

What we're seeing in a period of relative economic growth in British Columbia is in fact an increase and not a decrease in inequality. I repeat: an increase, not a decrease in inequality. If you look throughout the 20th century over periods of economic growth, you'll see that even though the benefits of economic growth are often felt inconsistently by different groups in society, nonetheless during most broad periods of economic growth, general living standards of every group in society have been raised. What is happening now is quite disturbing, because we see a divided province in terms of the benefits of economic growth. We know that we lead the country in child poverty.

I think this reflects a broader concern — and I want to talk about it a little bit in those terms — for how our society is going to develop and what it's going to be. Recently Trevor Phillips, who's the chairman of the British Commission for Racial Equality, came to Vancouver. He warned us about some evolutions or some concerns in Britain that I think surely apply significantly in British Columbia as well.

He said something that was remarkable — the product of his work in promoting equality in Britain and also the result of his work as an academic over the years. He said something that I think we all instinctively know, and that's that divided societies are inherently less stable than integrated ones. He points out that young Britons under 30 are segregated into micro-cultural and uni-ethnic groups or tribes that increas-

ingly do not speak to each other and don't understand each other.

His organization recently released a poll showing the increasing lack of social integration in Britain and the danger of that country succumbing to a phenomenon of solitudes. What this suggests in that country and what the changes and the dramatic rise, I think, in inequality — the dramatic differences we're seeing in income levels at this time, in levels of personal wealth between those that own homes and those that rent, those who work with their hands and those who have professional status....

[0725]

That growing inequality we see is problematic for our entire society. It leaves the society more divided, more unstable, more vulnerable and more lacking in common values. It's something, I think, that as communities we have to fight with everything we have. That is what I think. It is, in fact, one of the great things about Canada.

My concern in that context is that these deep divisions are having an increasing impact on our lives. We see it. Just last week the Canadian Institute for Health Information released a report. It said that in Vancouver there were significant.... There was, for example, in one part of the study a 15-percentage-point gap in the way people felt about their health between neighbourhoods. In fact, the report showed that there were greater differences in how people understood and felt, in terms of personal health, between neighbourhoods in the city of Vancouver than there are between many countries, including many countries with dramatic differences in terms of development.

I think you see that, and we saw that in that study. You don't just need to look at that study. There are many others. We've seen studies produced by Statistics Canada in recent times that show these dramatic increases in poverty. We see all of this. What it says to me, anyway, as I observe, in particular, the health debate.... In some ways the health community also symbolizes this.

Not very far from here at Royal Jubilee Hospital — and this is something we should be debating in this Legislature — there are people working on a cold tray line earning \$10.63 an hour. Their employer, Compass — installed, in effect, by the decisions of this government — has recently asked them to take on, as a matter of course, 12-hour shifts. So 12-hour shifts in a tray line at a public hospital at \$10.63 an hour, right now. No bonuses for them. Right now. If you want a symbol of this growing inequality, think of those people who are earning dramatically less as a result of the policies of this government — dramatically less. Think of them trying to support their families.

I'm a type 1, insulin-dependent diabetic. What happens when you're that way is that you have to balance food and insulin every day. Even when you're up all night, you balance food and insulin. Since I've been diagnosed, I've always had good jobs, co-workers who support me and a loving family. I've had lots of opportunities. Not once in my life have I gone to a super-

market and had to decide not to buy something because it was too expensive — not once in my life.

If you're earning \$10.63 an hour as a result of Bill 29, passed in this Legislature.... By the way, that rapacious company that this government put at Royal Jubilee Hospital, Compass — \$10.63 an hour — won't even go to the \$12-an-hour level that Sodexo goes for.

If you live with insulin-dependent diabetes and you are earning \$10.63 an hour and they make you work 12 hours a day, I'm telling you, there is only one consequence for that. You will be sick. You will die sooner. It is an absolute guarantee. It's a shame, and it's something we have to talk about in this Legislature, because we know it's part of this debate around the conversation on health care.

From my personal experience, by what we go through in dealing with a chronic disease, I understand the link between good health and personal behaviour. But I just want to remind people — and the minister responsible for ActNow will know this — of the profound link between health and the social determinants of health. What are they? Income inequality, social inclusion and exclusion, employment and job security, working conditions, contribution to the social economy, early childhood care, education, food security and housing — all of those conditions.

[0730]

If you think of what's going on at Royal Jubilee Hospital — at a time, by the way, when just about everyone else in health care has received a significant increase, you have a massive group of health care workers who have seen their real incomes drop dramatically and who symbolize, in fact, a society where many people have seen their incomes drop significantly while others have become hugely wealthy — you see the dangers to our society.

I want to say this to the government, because I think it's an important element of this debate. What I think is not well understood is that those decisions make us a less entrepreneurial society as well. All of the international studies.... I'll just cite one. It has a long title, but I'll summarize its argument in a minute. I think I have time. It's called *Nonlinearities in Intergenerational Earnings Mobility: Consequences for Cross-Country Comparisons*.

What it shows is that those countries that invest most in education, income assistance and public health care and that ensure the universality of those institutions and ensure access to post-secondary education succeed most. They see the most social mobility. People who grow up in the poorest conditions have the best chance of succeeding, and those countries that deregulate, that make health care, education and post-secondary education less universal, are less entrepreneurial, see less social mobility and depend more on the success and skills, in terms of their overall GNP, of the children of inherited wealth.

That is what the institutions of government are supposed to equalize. That's what happens when we see the kinds of cuts and reductions in services and a tax on universality of services that we are seeing today, particularly in health care.

I just want to quote a great British Columbian, who is not a member of the NDP: Judge Peter Seaton. He says something about health care that I think matches very much the views that Trevor Phillips expressed about social inclusion and equality in Canadian society. Judge Seaton said this:

"We Canadians take a lot for granted. I do not propose that we have a flag-raising ceremony every morning. I do propose that we as individuals stop now and then and recognize what a decent society we live in. Professor Evans" — he's talking about Bob Evans of the University of British Columbia — "said of another society that 'they don't mind throwing people overboard, as long as they cannot hear the splash. Most Canadians listen for the splash, and they do care.' The key is" — and he's talking about health care in the Seaton report — "we do not have one system for the rich and another for the poor.

"When people in authority are making decisions about health care, they are dealing with the health care of themselves and their families. So long as that is the case, we have a good system. If we move to a scheme in which those who can afford it have better care, it will follow that those who have not got money will get poorer care, and it will get poorer and poorer. Those in charge will not be alarmed. It will be the health of other people and other people's children that is threatened."

Having laid out what the central premise of my argument is here today and why I think this Legislature needs to debate these profound issues of inequality, these issues that are being raised increasingly about the universality of our health care system.... That central argument is that a divided society is inherently unstable and vulnerable in a way that impacts our way of life and that makes us weaker.

Let's turn to the present government in British Columbia and this health care debate. As you know, the Premier has launched his conversation on health care. His focus is on what he describes as the unsustainability of our health care system and on the need to consider private models of care. The Premier appears to be, of course, and has been, experimenting with this considerably over the past few years already in advance of a conversation.

I want to say this about the conversation on health care, as well, because I think it's significant, and it's significant to the debate we've been having in this Legislature over the last couple of days, in particular, and over the last week.

[0735]

What we have is a government that has consistently, even in health care, denied the opportunity of people to participate in debate. One of the main reasons, originally, for the regionalization of health care or the decision to move to health regions was to empower communities — to have communities have a say and to provide accountability. The notion was that if you move the responsibility for health care closer to the community, the people would have a voice, and their voice would help hold health authorities of all kinds accountable. That was the reason for it.

We have a health care system now set in place where health authorities frequently hide from the public, don't have their meetings in public and don't pub-

lish their minutes. We've gone in another direction. That accountability is the day-to-day accountability of the health care system that this government has undermined. It's not that you're having a conversation every six years — something that is going to change. It's the day-to-day accountability that they've undermined, just as they are undermining it in this Legislature today. I think that it's important to put that in context.

Then we look at a health care debate, and we know that the government is actively and vigorously advertising their position. Their position is.... Let me quote from the Premier. It's a rare opportunity; we want to hear the words of the Premier on this side of the House. I'm going to quote from what the Premier said at the B.C. Liberal convention a few weeks ago. The Premier spoke at length at that convention. Some members of the House may have been there, and some proportion of them may have been listening carefully. The Premier said in Penticton: "Health care costs are growing at two to three times the rate of our ability to pay — two to three times. Our population is rapidly aging. The older we get, the longer we live and the higher our health care goes, even with healthy lives."

Oh yes, he went on to add something else: "Within this mandate we will provide even greater tax relief for B.C.'s families in British Columbia." In other words, while health care may be a priority for the government, it isn't the number one priority, nor is the sustainability of government to fund the health care system.

I would say this. Let's just assess this question of sustainability, because, as you know, the Canadian Institute for Health Information recently did a very comprehensive report. It's an organization that, in fact, all governments are involved in funding. It said something very clearly. In fact, it said something the opposite of what the Premier is saying. It just listed the statistics. It's available on their website: www.cihi.ca. It said that health care spending — health expenditure as a percentage of provincial gross domestic product in British Columbia — has actually declined since 2002-2003.

Their report also said that the highest per-capita spending on health among the provinces in 2006-2007 is projected to be Alberta and Manitoba, while the lowest is expected in Quebec and Prince Edward Island. Where does B.C. rank? Is it first? Is it second? Is it fifth? No, B.C. finishes eighth in per capita health care spending — eighth amongst the provinces.

I haven't heard it. I've seen the \$6 million ad campaign. Listen, we could have an excellent debate in this Legislature — all of us in every community and, I suspect, on the other side of the House. The member for Vancouver-Burrard, who's working on the same policy issue, could have this debate in his community. We could all decide or figure out something, some way to better spend \$6 million than on an ad campaign that is, at best, misleading.

Here is what the information says as well. It says that private spending on health care is out of control. Private spending on health care is out of control.

[0740]

In fact, private spending on health care has increased in the time of this government from \$871 per person to \$1,267 per person, an increase of more than 60 percent — well over twice the level of the increase in public health expenditures. This is partly due to a couple of elements.

First of all, it's due to the fact that the government has off-loaded significant health care costs onto the sick. Think of physiotherapy and other services that they've delisted. Think of the Fair Pharmacare program, which has forced, especially, middle- and many low-income seniors.... Remember that the government considers you a rich senior if you're bringing in \$26,000 or \$27,000 a year in income. You're rich. It's sweet.

This is partly to do with government policy, but partly to do with the fact that outside of the controls on medicare, outside of the organization of medicare, health care spending is out of control. It's the reason why health care is significantly more expensive in the United States, even though so many people are uninsured.

If you're really concerned about inflation in health care spending, if that is your concern, if you're concerned about how much people are paying for health care in British Columbia, you need to look at the private side and the public side. On every major type of care — public care, public surgery, public prescription drug programs — all of them are more efficient than private.

Yet this government's only concern isn't the question of the cost of health care. If they were concerned about the cost of health care, it would be an entirely different program, and they'd be talking about these issues. They're not concerned about the cost of health care to people; they're concerned about its impact on government only.

Clearly, as we can see, there is a crisis in health care spending, and it has to do with prescription drugs. It has to do with all those areas of health care that have been delisted over time.

What has the government done? What is its record in health care? Again, today I'm not going to put too partisan a spin on this. I'm going to quote again the Canadian Institute for Health Information. What do they say? The Canadian Institute for Health Information, which the government partly funds — what do they say?

They say that the B.C. Liberal government has closed 21 hospitals: ten general hospitals, one specialty hospital, one long-term psychiatric hospital, nine extended care or chronic care across the province since 2001 — 21 hospitals. That gives you some sense of what's going on, but I think what'll also give you a sense of what's going on are the issues that the government hasn't been here to respond to over the last few months. It's their significant cuts to what we would call basic health care services. They're of course symbolized this week by the opening — the soon-to-be opening, the non-snow day opening — of the private emergency room in Vancouver.

The real costs that have occurred in this two-tiered system show the government to be on the wrong path.

Think of the MRIs at St. Paul's, something that the Minister of Health said couldn't happen. He said it couldn't happen. We said it was happening; he said it couldn't happen. Who was right? We were right.

The significance of it is beyond what happened at those two MRI machines and the fact that the minister after three months can't tell us what happened at two MRI machines. I'm telling you, it's the Inspector Clouseau of Blanshard Street. Two MRI machines, three months, and he's waiting until after this House adjourns to tell the people of British Columbia what happened. He's waiting. Surely it takes less than three months to find out what happened at two MRI machines. The Minister of Health is not releasing that report publicly while this House is open and we can ask questions of him about the results of that report.

But it's worse than that. This government is rationing MRIs. When they come down with that report, I'll bet anyone in this place that they don't tell us what the waiting list is for MRIs. The Minister of Health doesn't know what the waiting list for MRIs is. They are rationing MRIs. They are restraining MRIs in the public system. They are, in effect, forcing people to the private system.

The Khan family. Mr. Khan, who brought this issue of St. Paul's to our attention very courageously, made an appointment in March for New Year's Eve to get an MRI. If you were in pain.... What happened to him was that he ended up in the hospital in the interim period five times, twice by ambulance — so that delay is hardly a cost savings. He ended up in the hospital five times.

[0745]

What it means for people if they can't get health care in time, if you are forcing.... If you are saying that it's \$1,400 for an MRI, we are in effect not covering that, because we are not providing the service. That's what's happened in that case.

Think of the case that we raised in this Legislature in the few days we had, the case of Barbara Gosling in Williams Lake, who has booked an appointment for February 21, 2008. An appointment in weeks is offered for \$350 at a private clinic by the same doctor.

This is a government that doesn't believe in the Canada Health Act. I'm telling you, hon. Speaker, it clearly doesn't believe in the Canada Health Act. It offloads these issues to groups that won't take action on them and that don't have the authority to take action. The College of Physicians and Surgeons does not have the authority and doesn't see it as its mandate to defend and enforce the Canada Health Act. So when the minister offloads his responsibility, he's really saying: "I won't enforce the Canada Health Act. I won't enforce the law of the land. I won't enforce the law of the province, the Medicare Protection Act."

These are very significant issues. Where they lead us, the path they inevitably lead us, is more division and inequality as a society. Judge Seaton said it so well. He said that when you move in this direction, as we have so much over the last few years, the inevitable consequence is more inequality. And health care, the provision of universal health care, is one of the things that has consistently allowed our society to grow and

allowed an equality to be maintained in our society even when there are differences in income differentials.

What it says to all of us.... The people in this Legislature, who all get paid an excellent salary.... It says to powerful interests in British Columbia — and we want health care to be better for them too.... It says to them and to all of us that — and here I'm following Judge Seaton — that if we want better health care, and if we want better health care for our kids, for all of us, then we have an obligation to improve it for everybody. That's what it says.

This government is going in the opposite direction. We have a Premier who's encouraging the privatization of health care. When he had his first meeting in the Conversation on Health, many of us were there. The member from Esquimalt was there; the member for Coquitlam-Maillardville was there; the member for Burnaby-Edmonds was there; the member for Surrey-Whalley was there.

Interjection.

A. Dix: The member from Malahat would love to have been there.

The first speaker he put up — the first speaker, who symbolized the Premier's view.... The person he chose to put up was Dr. Brian Day. Dr. Day is the incoming president of the Canadian Medical Association. He has every right to participate in the debate. He's an outstanding doctor. He has every right to participate in the debate and to express his views on the privatization of health care.

He gave us a slide show. The Premier's personal spokesperson on health care did a slide show. The third slide was a picture on the right, and it said "1984" above it. On the right was Canada's medicare system; on the left was George Orwell's totalitarian state in 1984. That is where the Premier wants to lead the debate. That is what he thinks is an appropriate debate on health care.

I think most British Columbians would disagree. Most British Columbians understand that the conversation on health care.... I'm encouraging people to take part, to send a message right back to the Premier that they're not going to take it from him or from anybody else. But the reason that they're having this conversation, after having shut down public debate on health care and public debate around health authorities for years.... The reason they have it now is that they are setting us up. They want an endorsement for an agenda of privatization and more cuts to health care and an attack on universality. Everybody knows it, hon. Speaker, and I'm telling you, we are going to oppose it with everything we have.

[0750]

An Hon. Member: In conclusion....

A. Dix: I would take the advice of the Minister of Transportation, but my House Leader is insisting I go on.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members, please direct all your remarks through the Chair.

A. Dix: I, of course, encourage the Minister of Transportation to rise in the debate and to speak in the debate if he feels inspired. I'm sure that he will if he has some elements to bring to the debate.

I want to speak very briefly about another aspect, because I think that one of the issues that we haven't discussed is the issue.... This is, perhaps according to the Minister of Transportation, another subject he doesn't want to hear about, doesn't care about.

This summer the government appealed a court case. It involved a young man named Neil Fahlman. The member from Esquimalt has spoken about this, and I think it's an important case that has important implications for the kind of society that we are.

Neil Fahlman is in a terrible position. He has received, over the last few years, very significant supports from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, and because he's turning 19.... Think of this — 18 years old. He struggles with his issues in his life, including FASD. For 18 years and 364 days he gets significant support from the government. Then on his 19th birthday he goes from \$70,000 in permanent support, which can help him live a normal life and help him succeed in life as best he can.... All of that support disappears.

He has a very courageous former foster parent, who has taken a continuing interest in his life — Fiona Gow, who lives in the Victoria area — and she took this case to court. She's a very significant person. I know she'd be dismissed by the Minister of Transportation, but she's a remarkable person. She works for the government of British Columbia. She took the government to court to protect Neil, and she won.

The government of British Columbia has recently appealed that case and is making every effort to, in fact, deny Neil any support as a 19-year-old, condemning him to a terrible life.

This is a legislative question for this Legislature, and they have not raised it. They have not had the courage to raise it. They are hiding behind their lawyers. They could bring that legislation into this House. They could raise that issue.

You know what Neil's problem is? His IQ is slightly too high. His IQ is 76, and the cutoff is 70. The court said that was not consistent with the law. Rather than coming into this Legislature and address that issue, as the court has directed, the government is instead dragging Neil Fahlman and Fiona Gow and everyone else in those circumstances through the courts.

They say they have nothing to do here. When the government of British Columbia says that we have nothing to do here, think of Neil Fahlman. I think you'll understand why members of the opposition have been rising in this debate. There are significant issues in the province of British Columbia, and this is the place — the Legislature of British Columbia — that those issues should be addressed.

In Neil's case, in the case of workers at Compass, in the case of all those who deserve universal and speedy access to health care, in the case of those denied access to post-secondary education by policy of this government, by those who are working at minimum wage, by those who are not having their employment standards enforced in this province....

[0755]

All of those people deserve to have their voices heard in debate, their issues raised, their hopes and dreams and opportunities felt. It is in all our interests to have the idea of equality in British Columbia — not just the idea of equality of opportunity, because that implies that there is a level playing field, and the playing field is never level. There are certain things, certain principles, that are fundamental to our society, and equality is one of them.

That is a principle for which the New Democratic Party has always fought. It is one of the fundamental reasons why we have fought this week for the people of British Columbia. We are going to continue to do this. These are important and fundamental issues. We are not going to allow British Columbia society to become more divided by policy of government. That is dangerous to all of us. It will lead to more crime in our streets. It will lead to more division in our society, and we must as a province respond to this inequality now. This is the time.

It is not good enough, for example, to do what the Premier does, which is to make an announcement at UBCM about shelter allowance and then do nothing all winter long. If you're a young person or a child in British Columbia, you don't get those winters back. You don't get those months back. If you're Neil Fahlman, you don't get those months back. These issues ought to have been dealt with by the Legislature this fall, and they were not.

That is why we on this side of the House oppose this motion. We on this side of the House are calling for action to restore society, and we on this side of this House will always through our efforts validate the important role of parliament, no matter what members on the opposite side of the House think. We will continue to raise these issues. We will use the rules of parliament. Just as the government uses their interpretation of the rules of parliament to deny debate, we will use those rules to have a full debate of these issues. We will continue to do so throughout the life of this parliament until, hopefully, the 2009 election brings us a government and a parliament that has more respect for the institutions of this House.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Seeing no more standing out, Government House Leader.

Hon. M. de Jong: Thanks to all hon. members for their contribution to the debate. I have listened carefully, as I always try to, to some of the points that have been made. I won't, perhaps to the relief of all members, try to review all of them in any of the order. I

thought I heard two general arguments. I'll take a very short moment to perhaps respond to two of them.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

The first, I thought, that emerged quite strongly from members of the opposition who participated in the discussion was the desire to have this House sit in the fall and sit as long as possible. That's not an unusual request for an opposition to pose. It's an opportunity where we are gathered here for a type of exchange to occur, a type of debate that is unique to this chamber.

There is a means by which the opposition can use some of the tools available to guide that debate and bring their perspective to the issues that are being discussed. All of that is entirely legitimate. It really is, as a few of the speakers have mentioned, the essence of a parliamentary democracy.

[0800]

Now, members did hear, and some pointed out, that I had some comments around the use of some of those procedural mechanisms around the particular question of the appointment of the children and youth representative, and suffice to say that there was a difference of opinion. I'm not sure that I said anything that would have persuaded members opposite, and I heard nothing over the course of the last number of hours that persuaded me to alter my view in that respect.

As part of that predictable assertion of the desire to be here and be engaged in work in the Legislature, I also heard accusations that the government was trying to escape scrutiny. Those were comments not always limited to the past few days or the fall. It was in many cases a general assertion. I just feel compelled, Mr. Speaker, to remind hon. members that the importance they attach, I think correctly, to some of the mechanisms for debate that exist in this chamber, like question period, or the value they place was not lost on the government. In fact, I think one or two members fairly acknowledged the fact that question period is twice as long as it once was.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Could I just remind members to turn off all electronic devices.

Hon. M. de Jong: The notion that that is a legitimate tool.... But to suggest somehow that this is a government that has tried to escape scrutiny — the evidence, at least insofar as that one mechanism, that one procedural element of debate is concerned, runs quite to the contrary.

I'm also mindful that there was a lot of comment — and, I must say, rhetoric — around allegations that the government wishes to treat or somehow has shown contempt for this chamber. I will say this to members. I've been here a long time. I've sat in opposition for longer, I think, than any present members of opposition. I have been in this chamber for close to 14 years

now. It is a very special place, and we treat it as such. I don't have to think back that far. This past spring we tried to demonstrate that.

I don't actually recall any members of the opposition raising objections when the length of the spring session was extended beyond what the rules called for. It was done for a very legitimate reason. It was done because the work and the manner in which the work rolled out said to the government and said to me as House Leader that that was an appropriate thing to do — to extend beyond — and, in fairness, have discussions with the Opposition House Leader.

I don't recall hearing a lot of objections about the gross violation of the House rules in the spring, when the government consented to extend the session. But I guess that was then, and this is....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. There was patience listening to all the members from the opposition side. Let's listen to the Government House Leader close.

[0805]

Hon. M. de Jong: I listened to those comments as well, and again, I appreciate the context within which they were delivered and the desire the opposition had to deliver a message. But I'm also mindful of this when I consider comments and allegations of disrespect for the House.

The members of the committee who made the unanimous recommendation that led to the motions to appoint the children and youth representative will be able to verify for the House that they were advised that there was another means by which that appointment could have been made. There was another mechanism by which that appointment could have been made, certainly in the interim, but the undertaking that the government had made was that immediately upon being advised that the committee had come to a unanimous recommendation, the House would be recalled to ratify that recommendation.

Mr. Speaker, I've been here long enough to know that when this House is reconvened, the opposition has a number of different opportunities to place its stamp on the manner in which that business is conducted, and they have. To suggest that there was, and is, any intent to show disrespect for this chamber, when the government followed through to the letter on the undertaking that had been given to recall this House within 24 hours of when that committee had completed its report.... Again, I chalk it up to convenient rhetoric on the part of the opposition, but unfortunately, it's inconsistent with the facts — which brings me to the second argument that I've heard emerge.

This one bears a little bit of scrutiny because in many ways, having listened to most of the presentations.... I may have dozed off for one or two, and I wouldn't shatter the feelings of the members for whom that occurred. I heard this comment about how there

had been this grand undertaking from the outset about how the failure to hold a session in the fall — a conventional, fuller-length session — represents the grand betrayal, represents a violation of all the pledges that had been made. You know what. If it were true, then that commentary would have been justified.

The difficulty, of course, is that the myth that members opposite have tried to generate, to develop, isn't based in truth, isn't based in fact. I will do this in one or two or three stages.

I will remind members opposite that from the outset, from the time the rules of this House were amended, as has been pointed out by a number of the contributors to the discussion, it was always made clear what the purpose of the fall session was. It was always made clear that the fall session was designed to be optional, to deal with business left over from the spring session.

Now, I understand that that doesn't fit convenient....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Let's just listen to the Government House Leader finish.

Hon. M. de Jong: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand that that doesn't fit conveniently with the story that members opposite have tried to weave over the course of the past hours of debate. I also understand that they're not likely to believe me.

[0810]

I wonder, if I go back to 2002-2003 and some of those famous exchanges between opposition leaders and House leaders of a different time, only three years ago.... It's interesting to do that, because in those days the criticism was quite different. In those days — when there were actually, for the first four years, fall sessions — it was the opposition leader chastising the government for holding sessions in the fall when there shouldn't be any.

In fact, Ms. MacPhail said at the time that the Premier and the government....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members. I know it's late — or early; it depends on how you want to look at it. Continue.

Hon. M. de Jong: This was the opposition leader at the time. I don't think anyone in this House would disagree with this assertion: no shrinking violet. No shrinking violet when Ms. MacPhail said: "The Premier and the Government House Leader claim: 'No, no. The fall sitting is just to clean up legislation that was introduced in the spring.'" Her words — not mine.

"The fall sitting is just to clean up legislation that was introduced in the spring or non-significant legislation would be introduced," she said. "Really? Well, in this fall sitting of the session" — her criticism continues

— "the government has introduced 22 pieces of legislation." Shame, shame, shame, she says. Three years ago the criticism of the government was: "You are violating your rules...."

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

An Hon. Member: A little sensitive.

Hon. M. de Jong: Sensitive indeed.

"You are violating your rules," they said three years ago, "by having a fall session." Now, apparently, we are in violation of the rules because we didn't have a full fall session. I guess they'll continue to....

Here's what I found most curious about the observation and the assertion and the accusation that the government had somehow, in October, sprung something on the opposition, some nefarious secret agenda to frustrate the rules. I didn't actually have to go back that far, and I expected that any reference to 2003-2004 might meet with the kind of cynical reaction that we've heard, because in fairness to these members, most of them, except for one, hadn't been elected.

Here's what the throne speech said on September 12, 2005. This is interesting, for a reason I'll come back to. I'm not suggesting that the opposition members, at this point, like what was in the throne speech, although it's interesting what happened afterwards. Here is what the throne speech said.

"With a new parliament" — everyone had just been elected — "it is timely to recall the purpose of scheduled fall sittings. One reason was to give all members, their families and the public greater certainty about the legislative schedule. Another was to complete items introduced or announced in each previous spring session and any other matters demanding the Legislature's urgent action. Consistent with that intent and the added imperatives of this fall to debate and pass the budget estimates, the legislative agenda this session will not be onerous.

"In future years" — from the Speech from the Throne — "fall sittings will be convened as required, according to the set legislative calendar, to serve the purposes originally intended."

[0815]

That was September 12, 2005. No hidden agenda. Nothing secret. Nothing out of the blue. The throne speech.... If members were listening, they would have heard it from the Chair.

But here's what's really interesting.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members, Government House Leader. Just for a second here. This has gone on for, roughly, 14 hours with absolute calm in the House and no interruptions. Could we spend the last 12 minutes and 38 seconds with no interruptions?

Continue.

Hon. M. de Jong: "In future years, fall sittings will be convened as required, according to the set legisla-

tive calendar, to serve the purposes originally intended." What's unique about that throne speech is that in the 14 years that I have been here, and I haven't been able to find evidence to the contrary, it's the only time the opposition voted in favour of the throne speech.

I suppose it has been convenient politically for members to stand up and make these allegations that somehow the government has altered the course of legislative history. Unfortunately, none of that matches the facts. None of that is consistent with the facts.

To return to the purpose for which we originally convened, we have done important work here. We have appointed, on the basis of unanimous recommendation, a children and youth representative. That's good. The committee did their work, and that has now been accomplished. Beyond that, members have had a chance to express their views around some other matters around the decisions the government has made to convene the House for more limited purposes this fall.

I hope, having pointed members to the throne speech and the fact that there was, according to the *Journals*, support for what was contained in that throne speech, that they will disabuse themselves of this notion that somehow there has been trickery at work here, because it's just not the case. It's just not the case, and if they don't believe me, they can go to *Hansard*. They can check with their own previous members, and they can, of course, verify in *Hansard* with the Speech from the Throne.

With that, I wish again to thank members for their contribution. I have no doubt about this: that the comments that were made during the course of this lengthy debate were heartfelt and that members approach their duties in this chamber with seriousness. I have always thought that, and I continue to think it. I look forward — all the government members look forward — to when this chamber will meet again and this important work will resume.

With that, I move the motion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the motion is that the House at its rising do stand adjourned until it appears to the satisfaction of the Speaker, after consultation with the government, that the public interest requires that the House shall meet or until the Speaker may be advised by the government that it is desired to prorogue the second session of the 38th parliament of the province of British Columbia. The Speaker may give notice that he is so satisfied or has been so advised, and thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in such notice and, as the case may be, may transact its business as if its been duly adjourned to that time and date, and in the event of the Speaker being unable to act owing to illness or any other cause, the Deputy Speaker shall act in his stead for the purpose of this order.

[0820]

Motion approved on the following division:

YEAS — 40

Falcon	Reid	Coell
Ilich	Chong	Christensen
Les	Richmond	Bell
Bennett	van Dongen	Roddick
Hayer	Lee	Nuraney
Whittred	Horning	Cantelon
Thorpe	Hagen	Oppal
de Jong	Taylor	Bond
Hansen	Penner	Neufeld
Coleman	Hogg	Sultan
Krueger	Lekstrom	Polak
Hawes	Yap	Bloy
MacKay	Black	McIntyre
	Rustad	

NAYS — 27

S. Simpson	Evans	Farnworth
Kwan	B. Simpson	Cubberley
Hammell	Coons	Thorne
Simons	Puchmayr	Gentner
Routley	Horgan	Lali
Dix	Bains	Robertson
Karagianis	Ralston	Krog
Austin	Chouhan	Wyse
Sather	Macdonald	Conroy

[0825]

Mr. Speaker: Just before we continue, first of all, I would like to thank the Clerks and thank particularly the kitchen staff for doing an excellent job. I understand there's a great breakfast going on right now for those who want to indulge.

I want to say to all members leaving here that I know that the roads and the weather throughout all of British Columbia are not the greatest. Travel with care.

If we don't have the opportunity to see each other before Christmas, I want to wish everyone a merry Christmas, and particularly, spend time with your family, because that is one of the most important times of the year that we can spend time with our families.

I know that the business that's going to take place in the constituencies is.... You've got a lot of work ahead of you, particularly with what's happening in the province with the weather. Again, travel safely.

Hon. M. de Jong: Yes. Happy holidays. Safe journeys. I move the House do now adjourn.

An Hon. Member: Division.

Mr. Speaker: Division has been called. Are both House Leaders prepared to waive the time? Government House Leader? Opposition House Leader?

Hon. M. de Jong: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Hawes	Yap	Bloy
MacKay	Black	McIntyre
	Rustad	

M. Farnworth: Yes, hon. Speaker.

Hon. M. de Jong moved adjournment of the House.

NAYS — 27

Motion approved on the following division:

YEAS — 40

Falcon	Reid	Coell
Ilich	Chong	Christensen
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Kwan	B. Simpson	Cubberley
Hammell	Coons	Thorne
Simons	Puchmayr	Gentner
Routley	Horgan	Lali
Dix	Bains	Robertson
Karagianis	Ralston	Krog
Austin	Chouhan	Wyse
Sather	Macdonald	Conroy

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until further notice.

The House adjourned at 8:29 a.m.

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