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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2006

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

Prayers.

Orders of the Day

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

Throne Speech Debate (continued)

Mr. Speaker: Member for Nanaimo-Parksville.

[Applause.]

R. Cantelon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for that cordial greeting from members of both sides of the House. I appreciate that. I hope it carries on after my speech, but perhaps not.

K. Krueger: We'll see.

R. Cantelon: We'll see, yes.

It is indeed a pleasure to rise today and enter this debate as the representative of Nanaimo-Parksville. I have to say that it's been a very interesting debate, with point and counterpoint being made on either side of the House.

[1005]

On this side of the House a wide spectrum of political consideration was covered by our members. The member for Port Moody-Westwood has scaled the philosophical heights, disappearing into the metaphoric mist on Mount Everest with his speech.

I. Black: Kilimanjaro, actually.

R. Cantelon: Kilimanjaro — I stand corrected. I'm sorry about that.

The member for Langley has sought the opinion of the street, and she very aptly characterized that as the coffee-shop talk at Tim Hortons.

Both perspectives, I thought, were very well put to us. First, the view from 25,000 feet gave a broad vision of where the plans of the throne speech are taking us and need to take us. The second call — for a street-level understanding of what this government's priorities are and should be. There is no better iconic place to get that view today than in the ubiquitous Tim Hortons. That's where you get the real goods today, Mr. Speaker.

From the other side of the House, what I heard primarily was word counts. The word that was being counted most often was "transformation." It was done several times with different counts and then different interpretations being put on both the significance of the count and the meaning of the word. I was not surprised by this fixation on word counts or by the di-

lemma that this particular word seemed to be causing the members opposite. They seemed to impute a meaning to the word which does not exist and which was certainly not intended in the throne speech.

In listening to their arguments — and I did listen — they've interpreted the word "transformation" as some sort of code word that stands for the word that is an anathema to the very core of their political doctrine — the hated, the dreaded word "privatization." It is a word that instils anger and disgust among their members. It is a word that one must recoil from in horror, along with other toxic words like "profit" and any other words associated with business.

Transformation simply means change — change for the better, in fact. It was acknowledged on both sides of this debate that, indeed, we must adapt to the challenges that face us in the coming decades. We must actually embrace change.

I said that I was not surprised by this fixation. I was not because in the first session, a word that had the same codification connotation was often used by the members opposite to ascribe motives to our approach to governance. The word that I heard so often was "ideology." I didn't do a count, but I invite any ambitious members to do it. I'm sure there are many, many versions and uses of that word in *Hansard* from the previous session. That word, ideology, was again used as a code to mean that our political ideas and actions are dominated by other hated words like privatization and profit.

They've observed that we do have a high degree of interest in the economy, and they are certainly correct in that observation. The mistaken inference they have drawn, however, is that that is where it ends — that all public good must be sacrificed to the god of business. It is a cynical and pessimistic view.

The members opposite are correct, however, in their assumption that we do have an ideology. It's not very obscure. We've tried to make it as plain and as bold as we can. It is simple. We seek to make British Columbia the greatest province in the country — to fulfil the potential of its beauty, its rich natural resources and the hopes and dreams of its wonderful people.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

We spell it out like this: (1) to make B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent; (2) to lead the way in North America in healthy living and physical fitness; (3) to build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors; (4) to lead the way in sustainable environmental management with the best air quality, water quality and fisheries management, bar none; and (5) to create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

[1010]

These are the goals that define our ideology, that define our vision for this great province. It's no accident that the last goal is at the bottom. That is the one

that talks about economic issues. It is at bottom because it is the foundation on which all the other goals stand. The economy with a flourishing private sector, with healthy profit margins, makes possible the goals that will make this province truly great and make the next ten years a golden decade. A strong economy is simply not an end unto itself; it is a means to an end.

A strong economy, though, has brought many direct benefits to the citizens of all British Columbia. There's an atmosphere, a business climate of optimism, and this has been aided by our policy of tax cuts. Investors are now looking at B.C. as a place of opportunity. They've been offered certainty of their investment, so they are starting to invest their money here.

This has been most dramatic in the recovery of the mining sector. In 2005 the mining exploration was \$220 million. That's up 70 percent from just last year and a quantum leap from four years ago when it was a paltry \$29 million. This investment provides much-needed, quality, high-paying jobs in our rural areas and provides a solid economic base to many of our smaller rural communities.

Investment is needed in the forest sector too, and it was commented on by the member for Nanaimo — the demise of the Phoenix mill. And may I just say about the member for Nanaimo.... He mentioned he is distracted, and I understand that he is. I hope that his wife is doing much better. I understand she's been hospitalized for a medical condition, so I hope the members join me in wishing her well and a speedy recovery.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

R. Cantelon: The member for Nanaimo alluded to the fact that, well, we now have a federal government that should give out money. I'm not surprised that this would be, perhaps, the ideological frame of reference for the members opposite — to pour government money into supporting something. He referred to it as a modern mill. Well, we're growing older, Madam Speaker. That mill is over 25 years old, and it doesn't meet the modern demands. We do need to attract investment, and we do need to have stability in order to attract that investment. We certainly concede, and I know that the minister for forests and lands is embarking on a plan to attract that very investment into the community.

The Minister of Economic Development has also set up a new fund, and I think it's an innovative approach. Several funds throughout the province and the one that affects Vancouver Island is the Vancouver Island and coastal region economic development trust fund. Here, it's a different approach. A \$50 million fund is set into the hands of the municipal authorities and appointed board to make the investments that seem appropriate for their region.

I certainly know in our region, one of the ones that they will be looking at immediately is expansion of the Nanaimo Airport. It's critical to both the southern area of Vancouver Island and also the mid-area. We need new transportation. These are the decisions that the

board of this new fund can make, but probably it will be more in the nature of loans rather than of direct investment.

Things have been good. The unemployment rate has dropped. In fact, on Vancouver Island and the coast it's at a level of 4.5 percent, which we'd like to be lower, but that's dropped from 6.3 percent last year and down from 9.6 percent in 2001. In fact, it's at a historical low. It's the lowest it's ever been since unemployment figures have been recorded on Vancouver Island — that is, when they started to do regional measures of unemployment.

The employment, on the positive side, has gone up. There have been more than 46,000 jobs created in the last four years, and that's a dramatic improvement. Most of these jobs are attracting young people. They are people that are coming back home with their families, and that's very encouraging to see them relocate. It's been a good economy, and it promises to continue to be a good economy. It needs to be a good economy if we're to have the resources to face the challenges that we set out in our ambitious five goals.

The Bank of Montreal indicates it has an optimistic view of us. The BMO Financial Group predicts that British Columbia's economy will continue to be a top performer for the rest of the decade, with real GDP growth of 4 percent in 2006, 3.5 percent in 2007 and 3.2 percent in 2008. We certainly hope that the optimism and the strong economic growth that we've experienced will continue. It will need to continue if we're to achieve the goals that we set out for ourselves.

[1015]

While the five great goals that I mentioned earlier point in the direction of our vision for the future, the throne speech this week lays down the track. It's going to be where the rubber hits the road and where we get things done, and it's a very, very ambitious program. There are nearly 70 actionable items that this government intends to achieve, and that is the real, positive leadership that our Premier has provided.

There's much to absorb in this plan, so I'm not surprised that the members opposite seem to have missed a few points or have misconstrued or at least — be more generous — have misinterpreted some of the action items. The Leader of the Opposition has criticized the commitment by the Premier and the Minister of Education, Minister Bond, to visit all the school districts, accusing the Premier of ignoring the democratically elected representatives — that is, the school board and the trustees. It is as though she suspects that there's a plot afoot against them. This brings to mind an old joke by a psychiatrist friend of mine, who said: "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean people aren't plotting against you."

But that is not the case. In fact, I was with Minister Bond on a recent visit to Parksville, and of course the first group we visited with was indeed those elected representatives, the school board officials, who are doing an outstanding job with a variety of very ambitious programs that meet the literacy needs of the

young people in their area. The minister was very impressed with that.

Following that, we had a round table with.... The school trustees were there. The educators were there. The administrators — that is, the principals — were there, and another group that the Leader of the Opposition had forgotten about. That was, of course, the CUPE union, which was represented because they provide the learning assistants. We heard a very, very healthy and hardy exchange of all views.

This is exactly the format and the direction that our Premier and the Minister of Education will be doing to every single school district in the province, because we need to listen. We need to hear. I think it's appropriate in the context of talking about school districts. That is our first goal: to make British Columbia the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. These actions are actions that will help us achieve that.

I think it's very appropriate in the context of talking about schools to define the question before we leap to the answer. Certainly, I've been advised by my teachers and parents: "Ron, when you go to an exam, make sure you read the question." I think a complete and thorough understanding of the question, of the issue, is essential before you leap to solutions.

While we may be accused of delaying, I think it's very, very critical that we go through this process of listening to people in every school district throughout the province to understand their viewpoint before we develop policy. We certainly recognize that there are things that need to be fixed with the school system, and yet things are moving ahead. Things are being done, and we will hold the first-ever teachers congress. Certainly, the issue of class size and class composition will be a topic that will be well discussed in these round-table meetings.

Things still move forward, and I'm pleased to reflect on the fact that in my area things are already happening. There's been \$180,000 for districts 68 and 69, and they put this money to good work immediately with innovative literacy programs to help those that are behind in their learning skills — in district 68, where we gave \$138,000 to implement Literacy Lead Teachers at the secondary level, and another \$43,000 for an early reading intervention program that will be put into effect in district 69. These are key elements in our strategy to make us the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.

[1020]

The next goal is to lead the way in healthy living and physical fitness, and I'm certainly very happy to report that Nanaimo will take a key role in physical fitness and healthy living. We'll be hosting the Seniors Games in 2007, which I think is very appropriate for our community, being that we have such a high degree of seniors in our population. This is something that Nanaimo has excelled at.

We held the B.C. Disability Games last year, and it was my pleasure to attend on behalf the minister. It was an outstanding show and an outstanding performance. Everyone had a good time, which I think is one of

the first criteria of evaluating success. Everybody who came — the coaches, the volunteers — interacted, and it was a wonderful community event and a wonderful thing to bring the citizens of British Columbia together. The Seniors Games promise to be even greater than that, and I'm sure that Nanaimo will excel again and outdo itself in setting a new standard of excellence in hosting games such as these.

I mentioned questions and answers, and there were several issues regarding health care, which is also a part of our second goal, of course — to lead the way in healthy living and physical fitness. We talked about re-examining health care, and again I come to the issue of asking the questions and understanding the problem before you launch into successes.

It was commented by one member opposite that in the health care system, the fact is that the principles are largely undefined. Really, let's be honest with ourselves. Let's take a hard look at it. Indeed they are, in many different aspects. Many things are covered. If you go for certain types of examinations, they are covered. If you go for others, they are not. Certain procedures are covered, and certain are not. It may be an evil word to say — or words, I suppose. But the reality is — and we're going to talk about this — that we really have a two-tiered system in British Columbia. I wait for the opposition to react in horror. But we do, really, because those who have money can take their money down to the United States and get care immediately if they do. So we've got to recognize and approach this in a different way.

The member for Nanaimo, of course, said that he was against private medicine. Well, what does he think his doctor does? His doctor isn't employed by the government. It is a publicly administered and publicly funded medicare plan, but most of the medical practitioners, the first line, are in private practice. They are free enterprise. They are working for personal profit. It works quite well, but that doesn't mean, nor should it preclude, that we look at other systems of delivering medical services.

That is indeed what the Health Minister intends to do. The Minister of Health will travel to countries across the continent and abroad to examine different approaches, because we have to learn. As has been pointed out by other speakers, if we don't change our approach and look at ways to modernize our delivery of health care, it will consume the entire budget. Of course, the Premier has certainly said that the five principles of medicare, which we uphold, mean nothing and are empty promises without sustainability. So whatever system we look at, it must be sustainable.

Health care has certainly advanced in our area. In Nanaimo we're very, very fortunate to see a surgical ward be expanded — \$30 million. It was a great thing to see after the empty promises of the members opposite. Nothing was done during the '90s, and the building sat empty. Now, under the Liberal administration, those facilities have been completed, and it's one of the most modern surgical wards in the country. The new perinatal wing is now being expanded in Nanaimo, as

well, to give us a very strong level of secondary care for those with problems and concerns regarding child-birth.

One of the best examples of working together with communities was collaboration on the new MRI unit in Nanaimo, where the regional district and the various communities all pitched in. The Nanaimo and District Hospital Foundation supported it, and that great new diagnostic technique was put into the hospital. So things have been moving ahead on the health care front.

I'm also pleased to report that we're making progress on the third goal, though you wouldn't know it to hear some of the members of the opposition, and that's to build the best support system in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors.

[1025]

I was very happy to attend the opening of the expansion of the Arrowsmith Lodge in Parksville recently. It's what they would describe as their first community of care. Previously they had 59 intermediate care beds. Now, with the new expansion, this has been replaced by 75-bed complex care, which is a net gain of 16 beds, and the old facility has been renovated for 30 new assisted-living spaces. Within this complex of care they will have a range of services from assisted living to tertiary care so that people don't have to move from one facility to another.

It's been an outstanding partnership, and horror of horrors, it is a partnership with a non-profit society, an independent — it is not a government group; it is a non-profit society: the Arrowsmith Rest Home Society — VIHA and the B.C. Housing.

I was very impressed with the energy, the commitment and the community support that this society had in Nanaimo. They intend to take advantage of what has just been announced by VIHA — to, again, fulfil our commitment to 5,000 new beds — that the Nanaimo-Parksville area receive 435. I hope this isn't too much of a shock to the other areas. Also, 30 new care beds will be developed by 2010.

The RFP has gone out, and I want to tell you that I've been approached by several groups wanting to know more information about them. Of course, I've directed them to VIHA. There's great support both from profit for private partnerships.... There has been quite an enthusiastic response from the not-for-profit groups. I'm sure the community is going to rise to the challenge, and we're going to see those beds built and fulfil our commitment to build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, special needs, children at risk and seniors. I want to say that certainly the seniors, Nanaimo-Parksville having the highest concentration of senior population in Canada per capita.... This is certainly welcome news and fills an immediate need.

That's not the only area. We're also working with people in the city of Nanaimo to expand and work on the commitments for Willow WAI, which is an important transition house by the Haven Society that pro-

vides shelter, respite and a transitional period for women — and their children often — working in the sex trade or with drug addictions. It gives them a place to go to reset the clock and re-establish their lives. It has been an extremely effective program. They're working on expanding that, and I certainly support them in doing that.

Many things are happening. It's an ambitious plan. There are over 70 actionable items. One of the ones, again, that one of the speakers mentioned was: "Well, what do they say about housing? They've ignored housing." It was the last item on the page, and I think it was four pages of 70 items. I think the opposition could be forgiven for not reading all of the lines, but here it is: implement a new "housing strategy aimed at helping those most in need more quickly and effectively" and "give individuals greater choice and new flexibility." So this will be a program that will be unveiled.

This is very challenging in this era of rising residential home construction costs, and so a new approach has to be taken. I certainly look forward to the minister presenting that. This is only one line that talks about an entirely new change of direction for people with housing needs. It will be, as I reiterate, aimed at those in need to help them quickly and effectively and to give them choice. I think it's an outstanding new philosophical approach to this.

Also, the employment programs have changed — the line above that, with income assistance — and it's been quite a quantum shift. One of the benefits of this new economy is that more people are working, and therefore there's less money being paid out in income assistance. However, the budget hasn't been changed despite that. The money is being redirected to help those that have special needs and that are harder to employ because of their disabilities. Therefore, more time, effort and special programs to serve them in a specific and individual way and to get them employed — this is the new direction of that ministry.

All of these things are goals to support the five great goals. They lay out the targets. They lay out the tracks. They lay out the action that will actually deliver, and I want to say that that's what this government is about: delivering. Get on with it. Get it done. If we have an ideology, that's it: to get things done and to make things happen.

[1030]

I was happy on the fourth one, with regard to sustainable environment, to announce to the people of Lantzville in my riding that they're receiving \$2.4 million to upgrade their sewer system. This was a virtual environmental crisis. It wasn't a pretty sight in the winter in the city of Lantzville to see that the water would actually leech out — the rainwater, and we had lots this year — of the sewer systems and drain into the open ditches. It was a horrible health hazard, and now that's being addressed.

The city and the city of Lantzville have worked together on a partnership — and again, this is the sort of collaborative work that we would like to support as a government — to hook up to the Nanaimo water

system to provide them a more sustainable and more ample supply of water. So both the water and then the sewer are going to make a huge difference to the health and safety of the people in that community.

In summing up, I'd have to say that we are doing what we promised to do. Ours is going to be a record of promises kept, of getting things done, of making things happen and of fulfilling the five great goals. I look forward to continuing to be the representative of Nanaimo-Parksville and working for my community to get things done.

D. Routley: I rise to respond to the throne speech and to follow the example of my leader in commending the government, at least for one act, and that is to designate the kermode bear as our provincial animal. That is appreciated by all British Columbians, I'm sure.

But I have similar problems with the throne speech as those of our leader and those of the other members of the opposition. The problems I have stem from those who have been left out of previous speeches and those who have been left out of this speech. The problems I have with it are the unkept promises from other throne speeches.

We hear a lot about transformative change. We hear a lot about change generally, and I think British Columbians are tired of being told that they're afraid of it. I know, and I have faith, that British Columbians embrace change, that British Columbians have thrived on change, that British Columbians call out for change. British Columbians call out for a government that will change its behaviour and begin to listen to the stakeholders that cry out for attention in all the different sectors rather than listening to narrow and few voices.

British Columbians welcome a transformation of our communities but not the transformation they see. What they see is homelessness. What they see is a province that leads the country in the creation of part-time jobs. What they see is a province that leads the country in the number of children who live below the poverty line. What they see are seniors whose needs are going unmet, the disabled who have been neglected. What they see in place of all of that is spin and words and empty Liberal promises. What they have seen for themselves over the past four and a half years is a heartlessness and a negligence that are unparalleled in the history of British Columbia.

This speech did nothing for our aboriginal people, who need more than lip service. Yes, we need a new relationship, but that relationship could have started with the Liberal caucus supporting our motions to include first nations seats at the tables of all the development initiatives announced earlier in the year. The north island development initiative should provide great investment in our island, should provide great investment in our communities and should honour that relationship that is paid lip service by the members opposite, but instead, they voted down a motion to include aboriginal voice at that table.

[1035]

The Liberals, I believe, can't be trusted to live up to these promises. Their actions speak much louder than their words. This speech did nothing for the forest-and resource-dependent communities that need more than ideology. They need investment and support. They need a plan. This government has no plan. It answers with a Forest Act that has resulted in steep increases in injuries and fatalities, that fails to ensure that our communities benefit from the resources they produce. We are watching our future being exported along with our raw logs.

This is a great tragedy to our small communities, as families are disrupted, as services are cut. It's also a huge loss of opportunity. With every log, not only do we export the wood, the lumber, but we export the chips. We export the hog fuel. As a result, we burn more fossil fuels in our mills.

We've seen a chip crisis on the coast which is threatening our pulp mills, some of our largest employers in the communities, as low-price chips in the interior compete with scarce chips on the coast and the Island because of mill closures. The mill closures came about after the restructuring of the Forest Act by the B.C. Liberal government — mill closures that are a direct result of the restructuring of the B.C. Liberal government and mill closures that were unnecessary.

Saltair sawmill in Ladysmith. The workers of that mill are waiting to hear whether their mill will ever open up again, and it's very unlikely that it will as a result of this government's policies.

Three years ago the heads of the forest companies traveled this province and promised that in return for the changes they required to the Forest Act, we would see new investment, we would see new mills, and we would see a rebirth of the milling industry on the coast. Instead, we've seen closure after closure after closure. We've seen disinvestment. We see companies offered the opportunity to extract our resources and the profit from those resources without investing in community. It's a capital investment-free profit. It's their dream delivered up by this government at the expense of our small communities and our families.

This government's Forest Act is resulting in massive amounts of wood being left on the forest floor to rot, pulpwood that could fuel our pulp mills on the coast, pulp that could keep our pulp mills alive and keep our communities vibrant.

We see the threat to the Crofton pulp mill in my community, in my riding. I believe it accounts for 40 percent of the tax base of North Cowichan, and it's threatened by this government's forest practices. This has resulted in a crisis — a crisis in families, a crisis in the community and a crisis in our woods. Our environment is paying the price, our industry is paying the price, and it's not sustainable.

The heartlands, so popular in a previous throne speech, aren't being heard from anymore and find themselves left out. They know that the "hurtlands" was an appropriate name. They know now that they can't trust this government to protect them and their

communities. Instead, whatever words are whispered into their ears by their supporters and insiders will be the policy that's formed.

Instead of great goals, we see grim realities. We see homelessness, child poverty, environmental degradation, neglect of seniors and children's services alike and a total lack of planning for the future — my daughter's future.

Health privatization is next on the agenda. We hear a lot about clinics and about our family doctors — whether they're private, whether they're public. We hear about doctors paid publicly on prescribed fee schedules — not respective of profit, not respective of the need that the doctor advertised for the highest-paying customer — respective of those five principles that have been challenged by this government.

This government says that those five principles are not clearly defined. In the minds of ordinary British Columbians those principles are very clearly defined. They are the principles of fairness, equity and inclusion. They are the principles that we will collectively look out for one another, that we all deserve a fair chance at these services, that my daughter deserves an equal chance to the Minister of Forests, to the Premier's daughter, to every other British Columbian. That's the principle at stake here.

[1040]

That's a principle well understood by ordinary people. Ordinary people will well understand the outcomes, as well, if these Liberals are allowed are allowed to do what they plan to do to our health care system.

I think a question was asked in the throne speech: "Does it matter to British Columbians where their operation takes place?" I contend that it does matter to us. It matters to us that it happens in a facility that supports us. It matters that it happens in a facility available to all of us. It matters to everyone that we look out for one another. Ordinary British Columbians know that their children's future is guaranteed by a public education system and a public health system that gives them an equal chance, an equal shot, at success, and that's what's in peril from this government's plans.

We have that system now because of that commitment to each other. We have that system now, highly developed and perfectly and wholly capable of expanding, innovating and providing the service necessary to us and our children in a sustainable way in the public system. What it lacks is the commitment by that government to develop and build on what has been provided to them by previous governments and previous generations of British Columbians.

Instead, as with other Liberal experiments, they'll throw all the marbles up in the air. There's no pilot project for this government. This government.... Its idea of a test is to fire the entire arsenal. This government ensures that there are no second thoughts; it's a total solution.

This government has announced that it will unveil a radical, exciting and bold new housing plan, and I'm sure the stakeholders around the province in the hous-

ing sector are shaking with anticipation. I know they are, because they tell me that none of them have been consulted. They tell me that they've heard, as I have heard, that there's a nudge, nudge, wink, wink coming — that there's a bold new plan.

One thing that they can be sure of is that their voices will not be reflected in that plan, just as teachers have been left out of their plans, just as nurses have been left out of their plans, just as vulnerable children and vulnerable British Columbians have largely been cut loose.

B. Lekstrom: Is the sky falling here or what?

D. Routley: The sky is blue today. Yes.

We've seen their record: undermining public services, choking education, Orwellian accounting. So \$150 million more spent in education and fewer students equals fewer services, closed classes, laid-off teachers, fired special needs assistants. None of that adds up.

We've seen them fail to act to protect workers with their failed Forest Act. We've seen them fail to support the needs of the disabled and the frail. We've seen low-income British Columbians lose their support. Working British Columbians are about to have the rug pulled out from under them. The government will make a commodity of everything — public health care and public education — a commodity of those services that ordinary British Columbians depend upon. Your access, your service, will only be as good as your net worth — credit card health care.

Public education. Small schools closed throughout the province, and this government offers up on-line learning. An Internet connection doesn't replace a teacher or a small school in a small community.

I understand how these things happen. The Liberals talk a little bit too much to each other and listen a little bit too closely to each other. They slap each other on the back harder and harder every day, and they reach a conclusion that they're right because they tell each other that they're right, but they're not listening. They're not listening to those British Columbians who are crying out for support, those low-income British Columbians they're about to evict and those low-income British Columbians they've already cut loose.

[1045]

I understand that they're not listening. I understand that they need not listen to be able to use phrases like "transformative change" in the face of what they've done. This is radicalism; this is totalism. We need government to protect people, not just some people. We need government to protect jobs, not just corporate profit. We need government to balance interests, not pander to them. Lots of nice words to cover up four years of heartlessness, but where is the action? Where is the investment?

Global demand and low interest rates are not permanent. Remember all that talk about change? Where's the plan?

In housing the Housing Minister has declared the days of social housing to be over in British Columbia. I would like to read to him an excerpt from their 2005 financial statements. It's item one, "General":

The British Columbia Housing Management Commission is a Crown agency, established in 1967, responsible for developing new social housing under Independent Living B.C. and the provincial housing program, for administering the province's Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program and for administering a variety of other federal and/or provincial housing programs. The commission manages public housing stock and administers agreements relating to units managed by housing sponsors. The commission ensures that provincial housing policy is reflected in its programs and that these are delivered in a coordinated, cost-effective manner.

There are whole departments of universities devoted to urban planning and housing issues. The good people of B.C. Housing are proud of their history. They're proud of the huge toolbox of options they've developed over the years to deal with housing needs. They're proud of the flexibility of approach that they take. They're dismayed, disheartened and alarmed by the simplistic approach of this government — a simplistic approach to a very complex problem, an announced plan to switch from subsidized housing to rental supplements.

Rental supplements go to individuals. Subsidized housing serves the whole community and continues to serve the whole community.

We look around us, Madam Speaker, and see a wildly inflated real estate market where land prices prohibit the easy or affordable or profitable development of rental housing stock. At this time this government chooses to abandon its public housing stock. At this time this government chooses to abandon all the facilities of planning that that housing stock offers, all the facilities of social, transportation and health planning that that stock offers.

Rental supplements will do nothing more than inflate the rental market. Rental supplements will do nothing to provide housing for the 14,000 families — men, women and children — in British Columbia on the wait-list for social housing. Rental supplements will do nothing to address a shortfall of rental stock.

In Vancouver the vacancy rate is below 1.4 percent. In Victoria it's below 0.5 percent. In my own small community of Duncan it's below 1.6 percent. In those markets rental supplements will inflate rents for those who do not qualify for supplements and will do nothing more than reward landlords and penalize low-income earners.

It's a different story in Prince George — a 20-percent vacancy rate. A rental supplement certainly will help a person access accommodation, and it would not have a negative impact on or a negative interference in the marketplace. But in Vancouver it will, in Victoria it will, and in my community of Duncan it will result in higher rents.

This government doesn't care, because they're not listening to the people working in this sector. They're not listening to the decades of expertise that has been

developed. They're listening only to a narrow few voices, insiders and supporters, who tell them that this is a good plan.

[1050]

Above all, once they've shed themselves of this public housing stock and once they've transferred onto supplements all of the low-income renters of this province who qualify for support, those people are at risk. Those people become vulnerable to a government without heart. Those people become vulnerable to a government willing to cut those supplements.

It's very difficult for this government to rid itself of the responsibility of social housing. Those are big units. It takes time; it takes energy to convert them. Certainly, there's huge profit — that's been pointed to by the Housing Minister — in selling off our public housing stock, but there's no future in it. There's no future asset left, and once on supplements, those people become vulnerable to this government's cuts. At the stroke of a pen a supplement can be reduced or removed. At the stroke of a pen this government can abandon its responsibility to those people. It's not so easy with a social housing unit.

I think that the people of British Columbia should greet this throne speech with alarm, with concern that those basic principles of cooperation, collective support for one another — as represented by our fine public health care system and our outstanding public education system — are at peril under the watch of this government, are at peril because this government has a one-size-fits-all, simplistic, black-and-white approach to all problems.

That toolbox that B.C. Housing possesses does include supplements. That's one tool. This government is about to pull that tool and close the lid. It has only one approach — every problem is a nail — and only one tool, a hammer, so get out of way.

If you're a stakeholder in British Columbia in housing, in child care, in education, get ready, because this government is after you. This government will not rest until it has sold off the assets of British Columbia and left us with a mess. We've lost B.C. Rail. We've seen pieces of B.C. Hydro go. We should be prepared to watch ICBC threatened. We see health care threatened. We see them handed off into the hands of B.C. Liberal friends and insiders, and that's what's going to happen because of a government that has its eyes focused firmly south, overtop the interests of British Columbians.

Madam Speaker, I don't come here for a career. I don't come here to reward friends. I come here to represent my community, my children, British Columbia and a future that includes all of those. This government is bent on one thing: reward for the narrow few, paid for by all of us. We've seen four years of it.

I'm calling on this government to be conservative. I'm calling on this government to step back from radical change, and I'm calling on this government to be cautious, to not test-fire the entire arsenal, to not sell off the stock of B.C. Housing, to not privatize our public health care system, to work with British Columbians to preserve that which they most value rather than threaten it by reward to their friends.

Hon. I. Chong: I will begin my response to the throne speech this morning, as I have done in the last dozen responses, by first of all congratulating you, Madam Speaker, on being reappointed as Assistant Deputy Speaker and, of course, the member for Kelowna-Mission as Deputy Speaker of this House. We were served well by you in our first session, and I expect the same to occur this following session.

[1055]

It is always a pleasure to be able to rise to respond to the throne speech, because each and every one of us in this House has a very distinct privilege and honour. I say this each and every time because it is worthy of reminder. There are over four million people in this province and only 79 jobs in this Legislature, and each one of us gets to have one of those. That, to me, is a great honour. That, to me, is a great privilege. To be able to come to this Legislature; to represent your constituents of 30,000, 40,000, 50,000, 60,000 people; to be able to debate public policy; to be able to participate in shaping our province — this is very important. This is a duty and an honour that none of us should take for granted. I'm always pleased to be able to be here to do that.

Every year I listened to the throne speech when I was in opposition. As you well know, there are things that you can agree with and things that you don't agree with. I know it's natural for the members of the opposition to disagree and to oppose. That's to be expected. But I had thought that this time it would be a little bit different, because I heard the NDP opposition leader say that she wanted to propose and not to oppose. All I have heard is "oppose." I've heard very little about proposing. I will get to that in short order. The small amounts of proposition I did hear were, in fact, very alarming.

The throne speech didn't have an opportunity to speak to a number of the things that our government is doing, a number of things that each of our ministries is doing, so I want to take an opportunity to share with members of this Legislature what is going on in our ministry, the Ministry of Community Services, as well as the Ministry Responsible for Seniors' and Women's Issues.

I'm particularly proud of the public servants who work in this ministry. They're dedicated; they're hard-working; they're committed; they're passionate. When I meet with them on a daily basis — sometimes three or four times during the day — they, each and every one of them, come into our office with such a sense of dedication that I think it's worthy of note. If they're listening, I want them to know how much I appreciate the work they do to help me do the job that I have to do.

As I looked at the throne speech and heard Her Honour speak on it, I couldn't help but reflect back on the number of years when there was very little vision back in the 1990s, when there was very little leadership. While I know opposition members are grasping for things that they can extrapolate on, what they are failing to see is that vision and leadership are not about this upcoming or ensuing year, it's not about six months, or it's not about just going to the next election

— which is May 2009, and they all know that. It's about going beyond this term. It's about the next decade and perhaps even beyond. It's about charting a future that we can all be proud of. It's about leaving a legacy that we can all be proud of. As I say, we have a unique opportunity to be in this House, so it means we have a unique opportunity to leave a legacy.

I have heard the Premier time and time again, as he goes around the province, when he speaks to groups, when he speaks to small, individual groups or large organizations. He says with such passion and conviction that he wants to leave this province in better shape than when he came into this place and that he wants to see the next generation of young people benefit as he was able to benefit as a young boy, as a young man and now as, I think, a young adult still. He says so, and he believes it, which is why the throne speech is visionary, which is why the throne speech talks about things and talks about — yes — transformation.

Transformation is about looking beyond one year, looking beyond one term. It means going out beyond and being bold. Sometimes it's not easy to be bold. You get people coming after you. You get critics telling you that everything you're doing is wrong. It takes a true leader to be bold, and that's what we have in this Premier.

Our government's goal is to ensure that British Columbia continues to lead, that British Columbia is held up in high regard. I remember when I was in opposition. I think it was an article in the *Economist* that really said that British Columbia was the laughingstock of the world in terms of economic policies — just in terms of our performance. I just don't know how the NDP government of the day could accept that, could not want to make change, could not want to be a leader. Unfortunately, they maintained the status quo, and they didn't move ahead.

[1100]

That's not what we want. Our government wants to ensure that British Columbia is known for its innovation, is known for its inspiration and is known for its wealth creation. People around the world are beginning to notice. If you take a look, though, just outside the borders of British Columbia, which we sometimes get so consumed by.... If you take a look across the country.... When you take a look at international magazines and articles that are being written, people are saying that British Columbia is the province in Canada, is the leader in Canada. They are asking some of our people who work for us in the ministry exactly what it is we're doing to make this innovation, to make this change, to become in four short years a leader once again — a spot that we have deserved for many years but were left without during the dismal '90s.

We know we have achieved success in a number of areas, but that is not to say we should sit and rest on our laurels. We know that we have the lowest unemployment rate. Does that mean we shouldn't still look at job creation? No, it means we still want the highest job creation per capita. That's one of our goals, and we're going to maintain that.

That goal is not just to have achieved it but to continue to sustain it — yes, sustain. There's another word

that the opposition is so fearful of: "sustainability." Well, I hear them talk about sustainability in a number of things. There is no code word to it. Sustainability means just that. It's about the long term, a long-term vision.

Sustainability and having a low unemployment rate mean that more British Columbians are working. It means more British Columbians are contributing to their local communities than ever before. It means more British Columbians can support their families and have a quality of life that they want, that they can contribute to their communities, that their communities can flourish.

I am proud, you know, that I live here in the capital region of Victoria and that we have an unemployment rate of just 4 percent. It's another record low. In fact, as I understand it, it has dropped every single year since 2002 here in Victoria, and I would say that the rest of Vancouver Island is doing as well in terms of having low unemployment rates. Certainly, we will see challenges, because around us things are changing. But the fact that we can diversify, the fact that there are opportunities, means that we have to be ready to accept that. It means we have to be ready to work with our local governments, our local communities, to see that their communities can thrive.

We are a progressive government, Madam Speaker. We are progressive in that we want to continue to work at improving the economy. We want to continue to improve the economy because we know that with that we can have the financial resources not just for the job creation but to provide the support programs that everyone so dearly wants and talks about. Health care, education, social support systems — where do these programs get support from? It does come from the financial resources that are available to us. It comes from taxation. It comes from investment. These are things that are returning to our province.

Over the past eight months I have been able to, particularly, meet with British Columbians from all walks of life, from various diverse communities, from all age groups in the ministry that I'm involved with. As a government, I have heard from many of them who have said that we must continue with the remarkable changes we have been able to accomplish in the past four and a half years. They have told me that they believe in economic revitalization. They believe in fiscal renewal. They believe that social achievements can continue and must continue. I do hear optimism as I travel around the province. I don't hear the doom and gloom as some members of the opposition would have us believe takes place. There is pride in communities. There is confidence in communities.

[1105]

That's not to say that there still aren't challenges and that we are not still listening to those challenges. We will help those communities overcome those, but in order to do that, we are going to have to take a look at some fundamental changes. It means that we are going to have to explore and accept that there will be change.

We are no longer in the 20th century. Y2K happened six years ago. We are in the 21st century. The

global economy around us has changed. Technology has changed. The delivery of services, the way we communicate with each other have changed. The fact that we have laptops in this chamber... In 1996, when I first arrived here, they didn't exist. The fact that most of us have BlackBerrys attached to our hips most of the day — that didn't exist.

It allows us to communicate in a different way. But it's not just that. It also means that in the medical world, in the health care profession, new innovations are happening, and new medical devices are being developed. We have to be ready to ask ourselves: is that what we want for our citizens? I would venture a guess that they do want that. They don't want us to stay with the status quo. They don't want us to continue the way it was in the '90s. But we cannot be complacent. We cannot be idle. If we stay in the same spot, we will be overtaken by everyone else.

As I indicated, in my role as a minister of local government, I do have the opportunity to meet with mayors and elected officials around the province. Most recently I have been going to a number of the newly elected's workshops that have taken place, and I have met many new councillors, many new mayors, and they are all excited about their terms. I certainly wish them well, and I will engage with them over the next number of years in as many ways as possible to help them achieve the best for their communities. After all, we are all serving the same mutual constituents.

I know that we live in a province where our communities are as diverse as our dramatic geography and our colourful history — whether it's our largest city of Vancouver or our rapidly growing Surrey; regional centres such as Kamloops or Cranbrook; even quieter neighbourhoods in Saanich and Oak Bay, which I represent; or even smaller areas such as Port Alice or Queen Charlotte, where I visited in December. I know that in each of these communities there are British Columbians who care deeply about their families, who care deeply about their communities. Our work, our job in government, is about helping them to equip their communities to achieve their aspirations while ensuring that our system of community governance supports the overall development of growth in the province.

There are 157 municipalities in this province, the 157th being the new village of Queen Charlotte, the one I mentioned that I visited in December. There are also 27 regional districts around this province. Together these locally elected governments provide good governance to our diverse communities. They represent a major part of British Columbia's public sector, with annual budgets that total \$6 billion and employ over 40,000 people. These local governments, these local communities, provide fire, policing, land use planning, recreation services, local roads, water, sewer and a range of other services to our communities. You will hear from time to time, as my colleague the member for Nanaimo-Parksville just mentioned, about the sewer project in Lantzville. This is what our local communities provide to our citizenry.

Our mandate in our ministry means that we have to use our legislative responsibility for community governance with targeted spending to programs that impact and affect their communities in a positive way. But we do have to understand how our community governance works. This means addressing matters of provincial interest in any number of local provincial interests, including those of health and education.

For example, during this past year we were able to target \$80 million of provincial government financial support to 87 community water projects. This \$80 million provided \$120 million worth of projects. Our provincial government provided two-thirds, with local governments coming up with a balance of the one-third. It means improved drinking water and wastewater management, and that means healthier residents and healthier communities.

[1110]

The B.C. community water improvement program. We were able to use that to bridge the Canada-B.C. infrastructure program and, hopefully, an upcoming provincial, federal and local partnership that we will work on with the new federal government in Ottawa. We recognized the need to continue the momentum of the previous infrastructure program, which is why we have developed this new B.C. community water improvement program. We recognized the need to be proactive and get on with helping communities improve the day-to-day quality of life for their citizens.

We were also able to achieve a first in this province when it comes to securing a federal-provincial-local government deal, and that is with the New Deal for Cities and Communities. We were the first province to do so. We were the first province to secure an innovative agreement with the federal government, whereby we will see \$635 million in federal gas tax being transferred back to British Columbia communities over the next five years, and I know the first instalment has already arrived. I know that local governments are already accessing those dollars.

This agreement means funds to improve environmental infrastructure and health. It means cleaner air, cleaner water, reduced greenhouse gas emissions. It means healthier British Columbians. As you know, another one of our goals is healthy British Columbians.

Over the last two years we have increased support to local governments through traffic fine revenue sharing. With an additional \$70 million in the municipal system, it means safer places to live, work and play and improves community safety and community policing.

We didn't stop there. When communities came to us and said that they were facing another crisis and needed the provincial government to provide a framework or tools to help, we were there. We provided — this ministry — \$2 million of the \$7 million to the UBCM municipalities last fall as seed money for community programs to fight the scourge of crystal meth.

I believe that everyone in this Legislature — all members — when they return to their communities and speak to their community leaders, are just as passionate as each and every one of us about ridding our

communities of the crystal meth problem. It is a scourge on our communities. It is a scourge on our families. It destroys lives. When the UBCM asked to see how they could partner with us, there was no question. We wanted to step up to the plate. I'm proud to say that a number of communities are already accessing those dollars, finding innovative ways to do that.

The other \$5 million of the \$7 million strategy will be for increasing treatment programs and public awareness, because at the end of the day, so much does depend on public awareness. When you go to your first forum on crystal meth and you hear people talk about it, you are amazed how many people don't realize the impact of that, how quickly a young person or even an older person can become addicted. It can take only one try, and then the whole family is affected by it. This ministry was happy to be able to be a part of that strategy. We are building on this support with new funding, as I say, to support the prevention and treatment programs at the community level.

We will continue to work to improve our system of community governance. We will continue to be innovators in the area of local government. We, as well as local governments, know the importance of looking at new ways of doing things, of rethinking the status quo so that we can maintain and improve our quality of life. Whether it is by shared borrowing through the Municipal Finance Authority, pooled insurance through the municipal insurance authority or the modern legislative framework provided by the Community Charter that was introduced three years ago, our system of local governments demonstrates many creative innovations.

It is still challenging work, but to date our local government partners have risen to the occasion with advice and wisdom so that we can all build on the strength of our communities and provide cost-effective services to our mutual citizens and so that we can all build strong, growing regional economies based on the unique strengths of each region.

[1115]

As I said, it is not time to rest on our laurels. It is not time to just accept that we have achieved and that we can let the future years unfold. We want to stay leaders. We must continue to move forward. We must continue to work with our local governments, which is another reason why I'm pleased to be able to support the work on the Premier's Task Force on Community Opportunities. It is tasked at looking at how community governance and regulatory reform and revenue-sharing can be used more effectively to provide services to citizens.

There is, after all, as I've said, only one taxpayer. Like people in households everywhere, government is always looking to find ways to get the best possible service for the best value, for the best price. The work on the local government side of things — they're all steps in the right direction. They're all steps that form part of our government's commitment to our health care system.

I do believe that we all share a fundamental belief, and at the heart of everything, even while the members

opposite may not want to say so, I know they do believe that we live in the best place on earth here in British Columbia. Our commitment to that vision is unshakable. Our commitment to that vision will continue. Part of that commitment is effective care for our families, for our children, for our parents and our grandparents. We want to leave a better province for our children and for future generations, as I've indicated earlier, and we have a chance to do that here in this Legislature.

Over the past five years we have reclaimed our confidence, our optimism and our belief that we are a can-do province, which is why we're recognized as leaders. Again, when I heard the reading of the throne speech, it was a renewal of that commitment. With forethought and the ability to change and encounter changes in our society and in the world, we really can accomplish much, and the throne speech speaks to that.

The throne speech addresses the transformational force of our aging population. It is still hard to believe that one in seven is currently age 65 and over — what we have defined as seniors. But by the year 2030, 24 or 25 years from now, one in four will be in that category.

As I met with seniors, I've said this to them: "My mother is currently a senior." I know some of us, our parents who are still alive who are seniors.... I don't know everyone's age category. I'm not going to ask. But if any of us are in our 40s or 45 or 50, in 20 years we will be seniors. I see some smiles over there, so I guess I've touched on a few mid-40s across the chamber.

I know you're going to want your mother or father to be alive, just as I want my mother to be around still. You will be a senior at the same time your parent will be a senior, and your needs are going to be different. So how are we going to meet the challenges of two groups of seniors, those in their 60s and those in their 90s?

What I heard from Mr. Baxter, I believe, who is with the Urban Futures, is that one in three seniors will in fact reach their 90th birthday. That, too, was I wouldn't say a shock to me but an amazing statistic. One in three will reach their 90th. I do believe that, because when members opposite, as I do, send out congratulatory letters of anniversaries and birthdays, they must see that they are signing more and more letters of congratulations for birthdays at 90, 95, 100, 102.

I say 102 because recently I was in an inaugural council chamber with a constituent who was there watching the mayor give his inaugural speech. This was in December, just two months ago, and there was in the front row a senior citizen, 102, who still lives at home and is able to get around, sometimes with a little bit of help from her family. She was there, alert, listening to the inaugural speech of the mayor.

I am seeing more and more seniors — certainly, in my community of Oak Bay-Gordon Head — in that same healthy, vibrant lifestyle capacity. I have to reiterate the need for change, the need for long-term perspective, because we are going to have to accommodate, perhaps, two levels of seniors that we have never, ever had to deal with in the past.

[1120]

We know, too, that as we all get older the demand for health care will grow. It means we have to rethink what it means to be a senior, how our seniors live and where they live. We need to look at the changing profile of the health care system as our aging population increases.

Of course, as the Minister Responsible for Seniors' Issues, I was particularly happy to hear in the throne speech that — and I welcome it — the work of the Pacific Alzheimer Research Foundation was mentioned. Their goal of establishing a national research collaborative to find a cure for dementia is not only timely but significant.

By changing our attitudes toward dementia — looking for a cure rather than complacently accepting its occurrence — we can improve the quality of life for our seniors to reduce health care costs. I know that each and every one of us will at some point during this legislative session, or even in the next, talk about the seniors in our communities — as we should. We will all have to face some of their challenges. While dementia is not limited to seniors, it certainly has statistically been more representative of those who are older.

Last year, last October, we established the Premier's council on aging and seniors issues, and this is chaired by Dr. Patricia Baird, one of North America's leading authorities on health and public policy. The council is examining how to support seniors' independence and health and, just as importantly, their ability to continue as contributing members of society. The council has been working hard. They have been looking forward to putting together their final report, and they are going to have recommendations available that are due out no later than November 30 of this year.

I've already heard some of the concerns of seniors. They do want more housing options. They do want to live independently for as long as possible. They want expanded choices. They want appropriate care for seniors through a program such as Independent Living B.C. So we know that we're on the right track as we engage them. Over the last two years as well, through UBCM, communities have been able to access another fund which we helped establish, and that was to provide communities with an opportunity to understand seniors' housing needs. We provided \$2 million to UBCM to allow local governments to invest in that.

I see that the green light is on, and I thought I still had 15 more minutes. I only have another minute and a half. I can't believe how fast time goes when there is so much to say, so let me just conclude with a few remarks. I very much am supporting this throne speech, and I ask the members opposite to consider supporting it as well. I know it will break with tradition, but I think it is important they do because it means they will support vision.

They keep talking about having a plan. Well, I'm sorry to say that their plan is one of status quo. Their plan is to stand still. Their plan is to go back to the '90s. Their plan is to make sure that we don't have the nursing spaces, that we don't have more doctors being

trained, that we don't have enough supports that we're going to provide. That is not the plan. If it is, it is a confused plan.

Ours is one which is long-term. Ours is one that is visionary. Ours is one that we can all be proud of so that when we leave this place, whether it's 2009 or after, we can be proud of what we left behind — that we can leave a province better than what we inherited; that our future generations will not be upset with the decisions we made; that they will, in fact, have hope; that they will feel confident as they move forward.

Hon. Speaker, it has been my pleasure to be able to speak on this throne speech. I know others are anxiously awaiting to rise to speak.

[1125]

R. Chouhan: I rise today in response to the government throne speech. From the point of view of Burnaby-Edmonds, it has disappointed my constituents, along with many other British Columbians.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

Let's first talk about the public health care system, a place where I spent 18 years before I was elected in 2005. Under the Liberals' watch, the public health care system has seriously deteriorated. The waiting lists have grown. The waiting time in the emergency rooms is growing. One may call it being cynical, but it seems like all of this has been done deliberately so that the Premier could go out and convince the public that the public health care system in British Columbia is so broken that we have to privatize it.

Then there is a contradiction. The first 12 or 13 pages of the throne speech are filled with glowing praise of the B.C. health care system. It says here on page 14: "B.C. now has the best health services and best health outcomes in Canada."

[Applause.]

Keep going, but wait till I finish my sentence.

If the system is so good, then it's not broken. Then why fix it?

At the same time, in the throne speech we have seen that the Premier and Minister of Health are going to travel across this country and other countries. What is going on here? I think the Premier and the Minister of Health have realized that this would be their last chance to have a free trip abroad before they are kicked out in 2009.

To fix a broken health care system in B.C., the Premier and Minister of Health do not have to travel out of B.C. All they have to do is go to Burnaby. I'll be glad to take them to where they will see patients lined up in hallways. They will see patients left unattended for hours in crowded waiting rooms of the emergency department.

Yes, the system is broken, and it is about time the Liberals start taking some responsibility. The health care system is broken because the front-line health care workers have been sidelined by this government. In January 2002 this government shamelessly passed Bill

29 and later Bill 37. As a result, almost 9,000 experienced health care workers were fired. The removal of 9,000 experienced health care workers from the system has caused an enormous amount of difficulties for patients and long-term care residents. Patients and long-term care residents were left without the high-quality care they were so used to.

As a result of this government's privatization scheme, the hospitals are dirty, the risk of infection is very high, and the food is so bad people are forced to bring their own food from home. Patients are even forced to take their own toilet paper when they go to hospital.

My niece was in the Royal Columbian Hospital delivering her first baby. In her room she ran out of toilet paper. When she asked for a roll of toilet paper, she was advised that her request had to be approved by a housekeeping supervisor whose office was in Surrey. I guess that's what the Liberals would like to see: more and more patients bringing their own supplies so they can save money and that saved money can be given, handed out, to their rich corporate friends.

[1130]

Let me also share another story about my friend Michelle from Burnaby general hospital. Michelle lives in East Vancouver. Recently she had to use the emergency room services at Burnaby general hospital. She had a very troubling experience at the facility that reflects the current state of our health care system as it has deteriorated under this Liberal government. Michelle is uniquely qualified to tell her story, as she herself was an intensive care nurse but no longer practises, after having her nursing career prematurely ended by a workplace injury.

Michelle found herself suffering from an episode of sudden, acute and severe abdominal pain of unknown origin and got herself to the ER at Burnaby general on a recent Monday morning. Upon her arrival she was forced to wait for several hours in the emergency room before any staff even attended to her. You see, when Michelle arrived at the emergency department, there were no staff in attendance at either the triage desk or the admitting-clerk area. This is totally unacceptable. It is the emergency room where people go to get immediate help, but she did not get that.

The story doesn't end there. When Michelle was finally seen by the triage nurse — a nurse who's trained in assessing the severity of the patient's needs when they arrive in the ER — she was told she would have to wait as there were no beds available. Even though she was suffering with an unknown cause of acute and severe pain, she sat waiting in what she described to me as unbearable, breathtaking and blinding pain. More than an hour passed as she continued to sit in the waiting area. Michelle recalls she was barely able to speak as the pain was so intense, but she managed to get the nurse's attention to ask how much longer she would have to wait. The nurse informed her that she would just have to wait and added that if she did not like it, she could write a letter to the government or she

could go somewhere else, as there was nothing she could do.

Alerted by the nurses' obvious inability to provide medical assistance because they were so overworked and now gravely concerned about the deterioration of her condition, Michelle feared for her safety. She picked up her cell phone and dialled 911 from the emergency department, hoping to get an ambulance to take her to another facility. But she was told that they could not do it because she was already at the emergency department. After waiting for more than two hours, Michelle was finally placed into an ER bed, but it took almost another two hours before she was seen by a physician. In the meantime the pain continued to grow. That's one story.

We hear that at Burnaby general hospital day after day. Recently there was a story in *Burnaby Now* and the *Leader* about a couple of city councillors who had to experience the same kind of difficulties with their relatives and friends when they were taken to Burnaby general hospital. It is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, it's clear that the health care system in B.C. has seriously gone down the drain, and the Liberals have failed miserably to fix it. Let's stop boasting that it is number one, because it is not. If the Premier and the Liberals are so serious about fixing it, they should meet with the front-line health care workers. They will be happy to share their expertise at no cost to the B.C. taxpayers.

[1135]

On page 14 of the throne speech it says: "B.C.'s patient satisfaction levels are nowhere near as high as they should be, given B.C.'s outstanding health system, and we must ask ourselves why." Very good question. The answer is simple: because B.C. does not have an outstanding health care system.

Secondly, to fix it, stop privatizing the public health care system. Stop making your rich corporate friends richer on the backs of ordinary British Columbians. Open more publicly funded community health clinics that will be open 24 hours every day. That will help to lower the waiting lists. That will help people like Michelle, who would then be able to get the necessary medical help when they need it. Utilize the skills of foreign-trained doctors. So many of them are driving taxis. I'm not saying driving a cab is a bad thing, but these people are needed in our hospitals.

I'm glad that the throne speech has talked about giving more money to health care workers. I hope it is not just another promise, because in the past many promises were made by this government to the health care workers but none kept. In late 2000 the Premier met with the Hospital Employees Union and promised not to break its collective agreement, but like many other promises, this again was not meant to be kept.

With Bills 29 and 37, 9,000 health care workers with years of experience were let go, and many of them were women. For those who were left behind, their wages were rolled back by 15 percent. A good start will be to apologize to these health care workers, repeal Bill 29 and Bill 37, return the 15 percent of their wages sto-

len from them and then pay for the additional wage and benefit increases they so deserve.

Now let's talk about the so-called Pacific Gateway project. The Liberal government has once again started talking about twinning the Port Mann Bridge. They first talked about it during the Surrey-Panorama Ridge by-election. It did not work. Then they talked about it again during the last general election in 2005. Again it did not work. Now once again it is thrown out there, hoping that they may be able to milk it politically in 2009. But the public knows better. The reason it would not work....

First of all let's talk about this notion of putting in a toll bridge. When a toll bridge is put out there, people who would be using it would be required to pay, at least in today's dollars, \$5 a day to go back and forth on the bridge. Many people who live on the other side of the river and work part-time go to work in Burnaby or Vancouver or New Westminster, and these people would be taxed further. Some of these people are quite worried about paying a \$5 toll, and they will use the Pattullo Bridge.

[1140]

That's what the Minister of Transportation has suggested — that they could use the Pattullo Bridge. But the Pattullo Bridge is already a congested bridge. It is a death bridge. So many accidents have happened on that bridge and have caused.... You know, many people have died. Not only that, if people do take the Pattullo Bridge, it will create more congestion on the roads in Burnaby, as 10th Avenue, 6th Street, Edmonds and Canada Way are already congested, and they will be congested further.

What does it do to Burnaby Lake when the parking lot from the Surrey side, from the other side of the bridge, is moved to Burnaby? All the cars are idling there, creating more pollution, killing Burnaby Lake. It's not thought through. It's absolutely a political.... You know, it's a notion that it is not going to work. The people in Burnaby, in my area, in my constituency, are fed up with these kinds of political games being played.

Now let's also briefly talk about other areas which are not covered in the throne speech.

Multiculturalism. There is no mention of multiculturalism. This week we are celebrating a week of multiculturalism in British Columbia, but we are not talking about it to promote it. There is no talk about the contribution of the immigrants. There is only one mention on page 7 of the throne speech — the word used is "immigrants." Other than that, there is no talking about what has been done, what would be done, what could be done to enhance immigrant settlement services.

In the last session I stood up here and asked a question to the Attorney General about how that money would be used to promote and to enhance the multicultural services for new immigrants. No answer was given. Forty-seven percent of the money received from the federal government for immigrant settlement services is taken out, and it is put into general revenue.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

There's no talk about utilizing the foreign-trained professionals. When many of them come to Canada, at their country of origin they are promised that their skills will be utilized, that they're needed here. That's when they come here, but when they arrive in Canada, that's when they find out the shock — that they would end up driving a taxi or working in a janitorial business or doing something else.

What about human rights? Again, British Columbia is the only province in Canada without a human rights commission. Nothing has been said to address that.

What about farmworkers? When I came to Canada, I started organizing farmworkers in the '70s. It took me and many good friends many years to get some legislative protection for them. In 2002, when the change was made to Employment Standards Act, all the farmworkers were left without those protections again.

What about homelessness? Again, it's referred to in passing on page 33 of the throne speech that in Burnaby-Edmonds and everywhere else in the lower mainland homelessness has grown and is growing every day. But we have done nothing.

In conclusion, I would say that this was the most disappointing throne speech I have ever heard. If the government is serious about taking care of the citizens of British Columbia, if the government of British Columbia is so serious about health care, then start looking at the real solutions. Work with people who provide health care. Work with people who know what needs to be fixed rather than wasting money on foreign trips and giving out money to rich corporations who are already richer.

[1145]

Let's look at the reality and work together to make sure British Columbia remains and becomes the best province in Canada. It can only happen if you look at the proper and appropriate and real solutions.

D. Hayer: Before I start, I just want to say that yesterday I made a two-minute statement on Multiculturalism Week this week in British Columbia. I can tell you I got some calls last night from people saying: "Dave, can you go out and say a few things to your colleagues? Since we are celebrating Multiculturalism Week, can all your colleagues work together, at least for this week, to respect all different cultures and all different religions?" I told them I will pass the message when I give my response to the throne speech supporting the throne speech. I want to give that message to all of my colleagues in the House today.

I rose in this House last year to speak about the vision contained in the last throne speech and the promise it held for the future of all British Columbians. This year that vision and that promise continue with a great transformation of this province into an economic powerhouse of Canada. As this speech detailed, the strength of British Columbia is in its people, its seniors, its immigrants, its second- and third-generation Canadians, leaders, builders, innovators and risk-takers and the new pioneers of opportunity who will take advantage of the monumental potential we have brought to this great and important province.

One of the keys to our future success is encouraging British Columbia to retain its number-one position in the country in the provision of health care. Let us not forget that British Columbia is now recognized by the Conference Board of Canada for having the best health care services and the best health outcomes in Canada, even though some of my colleagues from the opposition don't like to agree with that. That's an independent study there.

This is not only very important to me; it is extremely important to my constituents of Surrey-Tynehead and to all the citizens of Surrey to have a great health care system. I was particularly pleased to hear the Lieutenant-Governor speak of the expansion and modernization of Surrey Memorial Hospital. Through the Fraser Health Authority, this government has committed over \$200 million worth of health care facility improvement in Surrey.

This massive improvement includes a new state-of-the-art emergency care and urgent care facility for Surrey Memorial Hospital, new beds for Surrey Memorial Hospital, a new perinatal care facility, a new 148,000-square-foot out-patient hospital and extensive renovations to the rest of the hospital. Coupled with the innovative \$60.5 million strategy to dramatically reduce the backlog of knee and hip replacement surgeries, these very positive steps towards improving the quality of life for many of my constituents were wonderful to hear.

Another innovation that is welcome news for our aging population is the desire by our government to work with the Pacific Alzheimer Research Foundation to establish a national research collaborative that will help find a cure for dementia.

I also want to point out just how very fortunate we are in my riding of Surrey-Tynehead to be the beneficiaries of the generosity of the Stewart family and Chick and Marilyn Stewart, who have personally donated millions of dollars to establish the Czorny centre for those suffering the debilitating effects of Alzheimer's disease. This is on top of the additional support this government provided our seniors last fall with an additional \$242 million over three years to improve their lives.

As well, the renewal of the seniors supplement means more money and higher income for about 40,000 low-income seniors. The Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters program is being doubled, and expanded coverage has been provided for those who live in manufactured homes to pay pad rentals. These changes will mean an additional 7,200 seniors will be added to the 12,000 who already receive SAFER benefits, which had not been changed for decades.

Another benefit for our seniors and, in fact, for all British Columbians is that thanks to the strong economy this government and British Columbians have created, seniors and everybody else earning less than \$15,500 will pay no B.C. income tax at all. This is the only place in Canada that's doing that.

[1150]

The buoyant economy we have created has also allowed us to give middle-income earners — those

making \$80,000 or less — the lowest provincial income tax rate in Canada and to give those with income over \$80,000 the second-lowest income tax rate in Canada.

But this throne speech was not just about great things that have been done. It is about things that will be done. I was particularly impressed with the creation of a foundation for health care innovation and renewal that will examine successful health care models from around the world. It is exciting that both the Premier and the Minister of Health are showing leadership and will personally visit Sweden, Norway, France and the United Kingdom to learn firsthand what those countries are doing to transform their health care systems.

We will not only be listening to the solutions discovered by other countries on other continents; we will be conducting our own provincewide discussion on what changes our own residents want made to improve our health care and protect our precious system over the long term. We have listened and acted on what British Columbians have told us before, and I look forward to hearing what they have to tell us about what they believe needs to be done to further enhance our health care system in our province.

We know they wanted us to train more doctors, and we are doing that. We know they wanted us to train more nurses, and that's happening. We also know that being healthy and staying healthy is something that is learned, and that's why I am so encouraged by the promise in this throne speech to expand Action Schools, a program that will ensure that all students in every school have a minimal level of physical activity and that even more students will benefit from improved physical fitness.

When we came to power in 2001, we promised to make health care a number-one priority, and we are continuing to do that. We also promised to have education share that lofty goal of being first in Canada, and we're working quickly to accomplish that. We have put more money in education than any other government in the past. Our government is creating 25,000 new post-secondary spaces — the largest expansion in advanced education in 40 years.

The Industry Training Authority will expand its program in trade training and apprenticeships. New initiatives will be launched to encourage employers to renew their efforts and investment in skills training. The Premier has said that he and the Minister of Education will visit every school district in our vast province to meet with teachers, parents and students to seek out their ideas for change. Again, we are going to the people to see what they want. This is a proactive approach, rather than what the opposition wants.

In the coming years the first-ever teacher conference will be held, and this government will continue to listen to and learn from community voices at the Learning Round Table. Perhaps one of the most significant aspects of this drive to make our education system the best in the world is that our students will be gaining a greater understanding of British Columbia's history and a much broader understanding and appreciation of our aboriginal heritage.

There are 67 direct actions, 67 direct promises and commitments in this throne speech. This is an enormous commitment for this government to make, but I know, based on our past record, that we will achieve all of those, because we are truly forging ahead toward the golden decade.

As a parliamentary secretary for multiculturalism and immigration, I was particularly impressed by the promise to further expand the provincial nominee program and to expedite the flow and credentialing of foreign-trained workers to address our skills shortage in our booming economy. The Premier has made a personal commitment to this over the last four and a half years.

A booming economy that is looking more and more to Asia for markets, for trade and for investment is going to create more jobs in British Columbia and give more opportunities for immigrants who come over here to succeed in our country. British Columbia is truly North America's gateway to the vast markets of India, China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Thailand and the rest of the South Asian countries.

[1155]

We are closer to these markets by days on the shipping routes, and we are blessed with deep-sea ports in Prince Rupert, Squamish, Vancouver and Port Moody. We also have key ports at Roberts Bank and New Westminster, and there's the Fraser Port right on the doorstep of my riding of Surrey-Tynehead. With this speech, we have the promise of further expanding those ports by expanding our contacts with trading partners to the east. We will establish a trade mission and on-site presence in key locations to open up new Asian markets.

To ensure that British Columbians can become even more involved, we will be expanding language training in Punjabi, Mandarin, Japanese and Korean and will develop incentives for our students and children to take these courses, to better enable them to take advantage of the golden opportunities that Asia-Pacific trade will bring.

While I'm always pleased to hear these initiatives to foster multiculturalism and encourage international trade, I'm always reminded that the quality of life of my constituents comes first. That is why I was thrilled a week ago to participate in the Gateway project announcement by the Premier and the Minister of Transportation. This multi-billion-dollar project will see the twinning of the Port Mann Bridge, the widening of the freeway from Vancouver to Langley, the creation of the North and South Fraser perimeter roads and the upgrading of a number of interchanges and overpasses in my riding.

The importance of this program going forward is paramount. My Surrey-Tynehead constituency office is located in Fleetwood, only a few kilometres from the Port Mann Bridge, yet it takes my constituents almost an hour to get to this bridge from my office. For almost everyone everywhere else in this province, that distance could have been covered in five minutes. And when my constituents in Fraser Heights go to shop

across the freeway to Guildford or Fleetwood, it takes them 45 minutes to go there. For anybody else in B.C., for the same distance it would take only five minutes. This is what my constituents face every day.

This Gateway project is needed now to improve and replace traffic infrastructure that is more than 40 years old, infrastructure that was designed and built when the lower mainland had less than half the population it has today. We talk about developing trade and commerce through our port, but unless we can move truck traffic and containers east and west quickly and efficiently, our prosperity and environment will be compromised.

To illustrate how bad most people — other than a few people in Burnaby and Vancouver who have lots of SkyTrains and buses, who have nothing but a great transportation system compared to what we have in the south — consider the traffic tie-ups there, how really terrible, there's a billboard along the freeway in Abbotsford promoting satellite radio. The slogan is, "Two million songs. Enough to get you across the Port Mann Bridge" — two million songs, and \$1.5 billion in

lost revenue every year due to the traffic gridlock, extra pollution in the air and time lost away from the family and work while stuck in traffic.

What we need are roads and bridges. We do need these roads and bridges, and we need them as soon as possible because those South Asian trading partners aren't interested in 40-year-old infrastructure.

Noting the time, I move adjournment of the debate.

D. Hayer moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 2 p.m. this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 12 noon.

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