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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
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SECOND SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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CONTENTS

Monday, November 27, 2006
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Routine Proceedings

	Page
Standing Order 35 (Speaker's Ruling)	5097
Private Members' Statements	5097
Asia-Pacific opportunities for containerization	
J. Rustad	
G. Coons	
Global warming	
S. Simpson	
K. Krueger	
San Patignano	
L. Mayencourt	
D. Routley	
Organic farming in B.C.	
C. Evans	
Hon. P. Bell	
V. Roddick	
Motions on Notice.....	5107
Foundation skills assessment test for B.C. students (Motion 13) <i>(continued)</i>	
D. Cubberley	
M. Polak	
C. Wyse	
J. Yap	
D. Chudnovsky	
J. Rustad	

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2006

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

**Standing Order 35
(Speaker's Ruling)**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on November 23 the member for Vancouver-Fairview sought to move an adjournment of the House under Standing Order 35 to discuss a definite matter of urgent public importance — namely, the need to ensure that all British Columbians have access to clean drinking water. The determination of whether the matter comes within the parameters of Standing Order 35 involves a finding that the business of the House should be set aside to consider the matter raised.

I've carefully considered the member's statement as well as the response from the Government House Leader. The issue of heavy rainfall and water quality has been prominently aired and is of great importance to many people. The submission speaks of the pressing need to ensure that all British Columbians have access to clean drinking water. The submission also refers to the effects of global warming. This far-reaching motion would presumably take into account the provisions of the Drinking Water Protection Act, SBC 2001, chapter 9, with which the member may be familiar. Although the question may be important, it is clearly a question of very wide scope.

[1005]

In 1981 Speaker Schroeder concluded that the question of a refund of \$12.1 million of school taxes to the city of Vancouver did not qualify under Standing Order 35. See the *Journals*, May 4, 1981, page 115. He quoted the words of Speaker Peel from Erskine May's *Parliamentary Practice*, 16th edition, at page 368: "What I think was contemplated was the occurrence of some sudden emergency, either in home or foreign affairs, but I do not think it was contemplated that a question of very wide scope, which would demand legislation to deal with it in any effective manner, should be the subject of discussion."

Although this matter is very important, Standing Order 35 clearly does not provide the appropriate forum for its debate.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements

**ASIA-PACIFIC OPPORTUNITIES
FOR CONTAINERIZATION**

J. Rustad: On this snowy day, it is rather a pleasure to be here. This morning I'd like to speak about opportunities that exist for British Columbia to take advantage of the Asia-Pacific drive towards containerization and, in particular, for Canada's North Pacific corridor.

China's GDP has doubled in the past decade, and it's now our second-largest trading partner. With China's continued rapid economic growth, constant development and economic strength in other Asian countries and the fact that Asia accounts for more than 60 percent of the world's population, we must work to meet these opportunities.

Many years ago Canada invested heavily in the St. Lawrence gateway so that Canada could take advantage of European markets. Since that time the world around us has changed dramatically. We are now entering into the Pacific century, and B.C. is the only Canadian province on the Pacific Ocean capable of taking advantage of this changing market. This is why our goal is to capitalize on our potential as Canada's Pacific gateway to North America and why it's one of the key components of our government's Pacific leadership agenda.

Just stop for a moment to think about this. China's growth is so vast that it's building a city the size of New York every year. Close to 20 million people are moving from the countryside into the cities every year, and the building boom to meet this challenge is enormous.

This also means that China will continue to demand North American goods, and we will continue to be a market for China's trade. Now, think about this for a moment as well. Just one new port in Shanghai is being built to handle 25 million TEUs — that's 20-foot equivalents — per year. That's just one facility in one city in the expanding economy that is China. This one facility alone dwarfs B.C.'s capacity in all of its ports.

The potential for B.C. to capitalize on its geographic advantage is huge. Are we up for the challenge? Are we ready to take advantage of the transportation opportunities that this type of growth can bring? Our government is up to the task. We are investing billions of dollars in our transportation network and infrastructure in the lower mainland to ensure that goods from around the province and around the country will move quickly to their destinations and that the Port of Vancouver is operating as efficiently as possible. We have invested significantly in building a new, integrated container port in Prince Rupert which will ultimately be able to handle millions of TEUs through Canada's North Pacific corridor.

Centuries ago the people in Europe dreamed about a western route to the Orient. This dream led to the exploration of Canada and North America. This also led to a drive to try to find a northwest passage. Today the Port of Prince Rupert is that northwest passage to the Orient, and that dream is about to be realized from centuries ago. This gateway will open up new opportunities for the northern half of B.C., for Canada and indeed for all of North America.

Economic opportunities are not restricted to our coastal port cities. They will extend throughout the province. My home community of Prince George is perfectly situated geographically to serve as a major inland port for the province of British Columbia. Its geographic advantage is positioned to serve the interior and northern B.C. It's also ideally located to take advantage of another growing aspect of containerization, and that is air cargo traffic between North

America and Asia. These two opportunities combine to make the potential for a world-class intermodal inland container handling facility right in the heart of our province.

[1010]

The Premier has made this initiative one of his top priorities. In a speech to the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, he said that the rest of the world is not going to wait for us and that we can't afford to wait for the rest of the country. We need to be a leader when it comes to the Pacific gateway.

In fact, the Premier has recently returned from a two-week mission to Asia where he actively promoted B.C. wood products, our province as a tourist destination and B.C.'s ports as a gateway to the North American market. The people in the interior share the Premier's commitment and concern.

A local organization, Initiatives Prince George, has recently completed and released their Northern B.C. intermodal cargo opportunity study in conjunction with other stakeholders, such as the Port of Prince Rupert, the Prince George Airport Authority, CN, Community Futures, the Ministry of Economic Development, the Northern Development Initiative Trust, and the Quesnel Community and Economic Development Corp. The study determined that there is a real opportunity for a container facility in Prince George that would be largely determined by the transportation industry.

The results estimate that the intermodal facility will require a minimum annual activity of roughly 20,000 containers, 40,000 TEUs per year, approximately 400 containers being processed and transiting the terminal every week. Now think about that. That's just 40,000 TEUs, considering we're going to have millions of TEUs come through. The potential is absolutely enormous.

A facility located in Prince George would also greatly increase the export capabilities of other communities along B.C.'s northern corridor, further advancing the long-term development and diversification of our region. Initiatives PG determined that an inland container port, with just the initial numbers I talked about, would support as many as 358 new direct full-time-equivalent positions. When the spinoff benefits are factored in, it may support as many as 856 person-years of work.

Our government's vision of Prince George's ability to serve as an inland port also includes expanded facilities at the airport. We have recently provided the facility with \$4 million, which enabled the airport authority to make significant improvements to the terminal and also to undertake a study with regards to its potential for air cargo.

Just a month ago, through the initiative that our government set up, the Northern Development Initiative Trust, they funded the airport authority's new development plan for \$11 million to help finance a 4,000-foot runway expansion. This runway expansion is critical for allowing our airport to be able to access the world's largest air cargo planes that are perfectly located in terms of the arc that goes into the Orient from North America. That \$11 million is the first component

of it, and I look forward to talking about more of it shortly.

G. Coons: As the member for Prince George-Omineca said, containerization is a great opportunity and has great potential for British Columbia, for Canada and for the whole northwest trade corridor. The northwest corridor is one of Canada's leading economic regions.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

It spans four western provinces with key advantages of having three safe deep-water harbours — Prince Rupert, Kitimat and Smithers — that are closest to Asian markets and having access to all necessary facilities. As we realize the potential for emerging Canadian port and intermodal opportunities, the pieces of the puzzle seem difficult to fit as cargo demands, capability, funding, port productivity and the ever-increasing environmental stewardship challenges that are expected are leering over our shoulders.

Containerized cargo trade will continue to grow faster than the world economy. Global container growth has outpaced GDP growth by more than 300 percent in the past five years, and it's predicted to maintain this in the future. John Vickerman of TranSystems in Norfolk, Virginia, pointed out at the recent opportunity-for-change port conference in Prince Rupert about the North American freight paradox. The nation's ports and their intermodal linkages are experiencing "the best of times and worst of times" in terms of growth and demands on capacity.

By 2020 North American ports and the intermodal systems associated with them will be severely congested, basically because we do not have an intermodal system as such. Containerization is the future of the northwest corridor and vital for B.C. and Canada. Are we up to the task, or is our B.C. port strategy wimpy, as described last March in the *Globe and Mail* by George Stalk, a management consultant who has focused on Prince Rupert in his four-year examination of the looming containerization crisis on the west coast?

Are we, as Stalk said, reflecting a lack of foresight that could squander our chance in a containerization push by building a "rinky-dinky terminal" versus one with more than double the capacity we're building for? Are we missing the five-year window of opportunity to be that alternative destination by not taking a more aggressive strategy?

[1015]

Last September B.C. Stats had a report entitled *Will B.C. Miss the Boat on Port Expansion?* The report backs up Stalk, because it states: "There are concerns that this expansion is moving too slowly and may not be ambitious enough...."

Again, the opportunities are enormous. But do we have the political will to follow through on the many challenges that are preventing us from reaching our full potential — such as the land issue, especially with potential court injunctions, with the federal government against the Port of Prince Rupert container

expansion? Both Lax Kw'alaams and Metlakatla are seeking a rightful address to consultation and accommodation.

I believe the Premier has been neglectful in his assertion that this is a federal matter and not a provincial concern. I again ask the Premier to take a leadership role in ensuring immediate resolution to first nations concerns about this vital project. In addition, meaningful community consultations must be ongoing so all citizens in port areas feel they are part of the solution to agricultural impacts, wildlife impacts, noise and pollution concerns.

In the B.C. port strategy it states that with the unprecedented growth expected in British Columbia's port system comes an increased need to manage the environment for the long term. This includes mitigating environmental aspects from increases in domestic and international traffic at port facilities.

Marine vessel emissions are a significant source of air pollution in B.C. One recent study concluded that ships are the major source of sulphur dioxide, which contributes to smog and acid rain in the Greater Vancouver area. Clean-fuel requirements, requirements to use electrical generators such as plug-ins while in port, fines for running engines while docked and subsidies for tugboat engine upgrades are among the measures that have already been adopted in some areas. I trust and hope that these emission reduction initiatives are B.C.'s highest priority so that they do not lag behind other environmentally progressive ports, such as Seattle, L.A. and Long Beach.

A presentation by David Fung, chair and CEO of ACDEG Group, entitled "A New Confidence in Outlook of the North and the Neglected," envisioned great opportunities to invest in some of the smaller and shallower container ports — such as Masset, Kitimat, Bella Coola, Powell River, Campbell River, Shearwater, Klemtu — to open up a west coast container distribution hub so that community-based manufacturing and short sea shipping could be coastal economic drivers.

Mr. Fung saw the missing elements in our port strategy as being no ambitious regional economic development plan; no regional stakeholder council with the involvement of Vancouver, Prince Rupert, the government, first nations, shippers and carriers; no business plan to develop short sea shipping or inland container-loading terminals along the corridor.

Containerization is a key. It has enormous potential, especially to the northwest corridor. We need a port strategy that does not miss the boat.

J. Rustad: I just want to thank the member for North Coast for responding to my statement. I want to focus on a couple of his words. He talks about — and this is a quote from him — "a rinky-dinky terminal" and a containerization crisis. Here is a member from the north coast, the centre of whose area, the driver that's going to be the economic activity.... He's not standing up and applauding our government's initiative for getting a port in Prince Rupert, getting the containerization happening.

Just a few years ago, when Prince Rupert went through a bit of a crisis of its own around the whole Skeena Cellulose, this opposition's idea of trying to solve the economic problem was to dump \$400 million down the drain — for no benefit whatsoever. Just imagine where we would be in the northwest corridor today if we had taken those dollars and invested them wisely in a port strategy, which we are doing today. If we had done that back then, where would the north be today?

I find it absolutely incredible that this member would stand up and say that we are moving too slowly. How hypocritical can that be? We have taken every advantage we can to make the port happen, to make those opportunities happen throughout the north.

You know, the benefits of that port are not just going to be around Prince Rupert. They are truly going to be around the entire northern corridor. In Prince George in particular, the benefits are going to be enormous.

Think about containerization. We think about it in terms of moving general goods. I have a little company out in Fort Fraser that is looking forward to the opportunities that will come from containerization. They're looking forward to the idea of being able to market their bottled water to markets around the world, in Asia. Those are opportunities that would never have come if it wasn't for the opportunities that are created by our government to make that Port of Prince Rupert become a reality.

[1020]

In closing, an inland container facility in Prince George is just one piece of an enormous puzzle that is ultimately going to lead to diversification throughout the north, that's going to create new opportunities and new hope, that's going to be part of the long-term strategy in terms of the impacts of pine beetle, and that is going to lead this province forward and lead our region to new economic development that, quite frankly, will be a very exciting time. I look forward to the member for North Coast realizing the vision we are creating and applauding our government and those opportunities we'll create for his riding as well as throughout the north.

GLOBAL WARMING

S. Simpson: As every member in this House will know, certainly one of the key issues in the world today and probably the biggest, most compelling issue in the country today is global warming. We hear continually about the impacts we're facing today with global warming around the world, and we will increasingly hear about those impacts, I'm sure, in British Columbia and across Canada.

In British Columbia our citizens are increasingly understanding what global warming means for us here in this province. We are seeing that the impacts of global warming aren't something that is going to come in the future; they're something that is occurring today. They're something that we need to deal with today and begin to put in place the kinds of strategies and approaches that will allow us to address global warming.

We've seen the floods that are occurring. We're heard of the impacts of those floods on people and on communities in our province. We've certainly had discussions over the last number of years around issues related to drinking water and the availability of drinking water and ensuring that our communities have safe and secure drinking water. We've heard about the glaciers in many communities. When I was in Smithers and other communities, people talked about the glaciers and said: "You know, I've been able to look out my window and see those glaciers recede year after year, just a little bit. It doesn't look the way it looked 20 years ago."

In the area of agriculture, the B.C. Agriculture Council has told us that probably climate change and global warming will be the single biggest issue they need to deal with over the next number of years as they determine and work towards the future of agriculture in our province and begin to look at how they address issues of agriculture and food security in our province.

We have heard about the potential impacts on salmon, particularly salmon in our oceans, and whether they are impacting our food supply. Then of course we hear about the warming of our rivers and streams and whether there is an impact there on salmon coming back to spawn. Every year now there is an anxiety about whether those rivers and streams will warm up too much at the time our fish come back to spawn and whether it will in fact impact them in very negative ways. We all hold our breath a little bit, hoping that won't be the case and that won't be the negative impact.

Of course, probably the single biggest and most impactful issue in this province that we've seen over the last number of years is the beetle — the impact of the beetle that has devastated our forests. As we all know — and certainly the members from the communities that are experiencing the beetle know it best — the beetle has been there for a long time, but we could count on nature to take care of these kinds of things in the past. We would get the kinds of winters we needed to ensure the beetle was dealt with by Mother Nature, and we're not seeing those winters anymore.

That is an impact, I believe, of climate change. As a consequence, we have a very uncertain future for many, many communities in this province after the wood is out. What will happen in those communities is not certain. There are no easy answers for anybody as to how we deal with those challenges.

How is the government doing on addressing these issues around global warming? Well, as far as our nation goes, there has been a great deal of criticism over the past number of months of the current Conservative government on their dealing with climate change and global warming. Recently in Nairobi there were reports put out that Canada had been ranked, I think, 51 out of 56 countries there in terms of how they were responding.

[1025]

We have a nation here in Canada that is not being held in very high esteem around the world at this point in time in terms of how we're addressing this issue. In British Columbia what we know is that in 2004 we had

the second-highest rate of increase in emissions of any province in the country. What we've had in British Columbia is a situation where we have seen increases. We've been very fortunate because hydroelectric power is where our energy primarily comes from — quite a clean source of power. But we have seen that we are increasing our emissions every year. In 2004 the emissions increased more than any place but in New Brunswick.

The government does have a climate change action plan. The criticism of that action plan, which is a substantive one, is that in fact we see no targets on there. And we see service plans that I would suggest.... You'd be hard-pressed to find much substantive discussion of global warming in any of the government service plans today.

The response to that has been to say yes to coal. We know the impacts of coal, and we know that this is the dirtiest form of power that we can face. What we know is that even Liberal activists like Mr. Manion in Yale-Lillooet are coming out and telling the government to stop — members of the local constituency association there and past aspirants to being members of this House, like Mr. Jim Manion.

The issue really is: what do we do next? Well, it's time for us to set real, hard targets that we're prepared to aspire to meet. It's time to open a real discussion in this province about global warming and how we approach it, to do the analysis, to develop real adaptation policies for our province and to begin to analyze how energy transportation and buildings can be addressed in terms of reducing emissions.

It's time that we paid attention in this House. On our side we have called on the government to establish a special committee of the Legislature to deal with global warming and climate change, to travel this province and come back to this House in due course, and to report out to the House on how we deal in an effective way with global warming and climate change. At this point we see nothing to suggest that the government is in fact prepared to do that.

I would hope that the government side would consider this. I hope that the Minister of Environment, who shockingly is out campaigning in favour of coal and campaigning in favour of increased emissions, will pay attention to that and bring something forward to deal with this issue.

Deputy Speaker: In response, the member for Kamloops-North Thompson.

K. Krueger: I thank the member for Vancouver-Hastings for some of his remarks. I will get to the minister's position on coal-fired electricity shortly. I do want to point out that with the weather today and the fact that the member may have written his speech last Friday, he obviously didn't think we were in for any cold weather. We had a tremendous snowfall today all around the province. The member for Peace River South sitting beside me whispered: "If climate change is happening, my people would like it sooner than later

because it's 45 below there today." They've had the most snow in 35 years.

The fact is that climate change is a really tough, complex, difficult issue. In my constituency in 2003, three of the worst wildfires of that awful forest fire season occurred. This past fall there were worries that the North Thompson River would actually freeze right to the bottom, because no one had ever seen it that low before, which would have been a disaster for fish.

Of course, we host the Adams Lake sockeye run right through my constituency — the largest sockeye salmon run in the world. In recent years, perplexingly, they're coming up the river too early, and many then die before they can spawn. It's a big concern.

The member mentioned mountain pine beetle and the orange forests throughout our province. We spent billions of dollars carefully planning logging over the decades, and now all those carefully preserved cut-blocks are dead. I have constituents who believe that Lyme disease is expanding its territory rapidly. Ticks that carry it are probably finding friendlier conditions than they used to, just like the mountain pine beetle.

[1030]

How does government help the people and the communities — all of which are being affected by this, but some more dramatically than others, particularly in rural areas? The member asked how the government is doing. I think the government is doing pretty darn well, considering the fact that our economy was on its back in the 1990s and is now one of the most robust economies in Canada. That is bound to create some issues around things like greenhouse gases.

I think it's really surprising that in the five years of the B.C. Liberal government we've only had a 5-percent increase in greenhouse gases, when in the previous ten years we had a 24-percent increase. The member mentioned that this government has a climate change action plan, and he's right. It contains 40 key points.

There was no climate change action plan by the bygone government. We take this issue very, very seriously, so we introduced that action plan in 2004. It's a commitment and a very long-term approach. We're long-term thinkers. We're businesslike in what we do, and we get good results.

By 2004 the B.C. government, in this decade, had reduced government emissions of carbon dioxide equivalency by 23.9 percent, which is 32,700 tonnes. That's an accomplishment. We focus both on greenhouse gas reductions and adaptation to climate change impacts, and that's important. People talk about NIMBY syndrome and CAVE people. CAVE people are "citizens against virtually everything." If CAVE people and the dinosaurs had made any plan at all to deal with climate change, they'd still be fossils today, because you have to think about adaptation as well as about focusing on reduction of greenhouse gases.

We're investing almost a billion dollars on projects like rapid transit and energy efficiency. I think it's disingenuous for any member of this House to speak against considering producing electricity through coal-fired or partially coal-fired facilities when we have

been importing coal-fired electricity from Alberta for years, because we are a net importing province for electricity. There was no new generation capacity built in the entire decade of the 1990s, and that left us buying coal-fired gas from Alberta. Why would we...?

Deputy Speaker: Excuse me. I would like to remind all members, as a courtesy, to allow the Speaker to speak and also to remind members that to make any comment, they must be in their own seat.

K. Krueger: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

How could we honestly say that we'll never have coal-fired electricity in British Columbia, when we've been buying it from Alberta for 15 years? B.C. Hydro makes good revenue for the province, and they do it because our W.A.C. Bennett legacy of hydroelectricity can be produced any time of the day that we want to, and we produce it when the price is the highest and sell it to California. That's how we make the revenues from electricity that help pay for education and health care.

The balance is that since we are not producing enough, and haven't for a number of years now, to meet the needs of British Columbians, we have to import it from somewhere. We do import it from the U.S.A. and Alberta, and a lot of it is coal-fired. It might surprise the members, as it did me, to learn that burning mountain pine beetle wood is considered more environmentally friendly than natural degeneration of it.

I thank the member for his comments. I hope he finds some nice things to say about the minister in his closing comments.

S. Simpson: Quite honestly, to the member: I think the minister is a fine fellow. The problem the minister has is that he simply is window dressing in that cabinet, like everybody who came before him in that portfolio. You have a Minister of Environment who has a portfolio in this cabinet that just goes to the bottom of the list when there is consideration of matters of importance to British Columbians.

This government has been dismissive of global warming, Mr. Speaker. I challenge you to go and look through the service plans of last year and find substantive discussion of global warming and climate change in any of those service plans that talk about real plans and real strategies for dealing with it. They don't exist.

The member previous was producing numbers out of the air again, which come with no foundation to them. He's making up numbers about what in fact the emissions are unto this government. Those numbers are simply not accurate.

Let's talk about this coal plant. The reality of these two coal plants is that they will produce 1.7 million tonnes of additional emissions annually. That will double the number of electrical and heating emissions in this province from what they are today. We will double the amount of emissions in this province. That's what the minister is campaigning for. That's what the member is campaigning for, and cheering on.

[1035]

There is a discussion about clean coal. There is nothing clean about this technology. If this government actually had the innovation, the forethought and the intelligence to come forward and say, "We're going to try to do clean coal. We're going to invest, along with industry, to actually do gasification and sequestration," then we'd have something to talk about. But that's not what the government is saying. It's saying: "Burn dirty coal. We don't care. It doesn't matter to us." That's the problem we face today.

The member talks about B.C. Hydro. Well, this government gutted B.C. Hydro. This government took away the research and development department. It took away Hydro's ability to be innovative in terms of going out and developing new projects. It said: "You're going to go out and buy independent power, and you're going to buy it at outrageous prices to fill the pockets of our friends. We'll get five bucks back or something to that effect, and we'll pay \$80 and change for every one of those megawatt hours that we get \$5 for." That's not very good business for us.

We could do clean power. We could do this in an innovative way, but we need to have somebody leading the way on that. It's certainly not the minister; it's certainly not this government. If you want to do something innovative, give Hydro back the power and the mandate — the authority and the mandate — to go develop its own projects and initiatives, and tell them to go and build us a green energy strategy.

SAN PATRIGNANO

L. Mayencourt: I'm very concerned about the homeless and addicted in British Columbia. I have a dream that I think can help us face those twin problems, a dream that was born in a community called San Patrignano. Here I have personally seen a treatment and recovery program that has been pioneered, developed and sustained for the past 28 years with unparalleled success. In fact, it has proven to be the most effective long-term treatment model on a global level, and I think it is something that British Columbia can learn from.

When I express my concern for the homeless and addicted, I know I'm not alone. The public tells me and others daily that we have very urgent problems that need to be addressed right now. One of the most is the interrelated issue of homelessness and addictions. If you left this House right now and walked a few blocks, it would not take you very long to find someone that is homeless and addicted. It has enormous implications for all of us.

Just think of the economics for a moment. What does it cost us to lose convention after convention; to have travel magazines tell tourists to stay away from certain parts of our cities; to have higher insurance rates for our cars and our homes; and to live in a world where addicts fix at bus stops, school grounds and play areas?

Most importantly, there is an incredible social consequence that we pay, where our own quality of life is suffering. Here it is: what is the cost to a community

that has been coerced into avoiding public spaces because of the onslaught of criminals and drug dealers?

Although we know the problem exists, it is often tempting for us to ignore it or pretend it's not there anymore. We hear that the crime rate is down or that street disorder has been curbed, but we all know that homelessness and addiction issues remain an unsolved problem, a growing problem that is clearly not going away.

Experts have told us that we face unparalleled challenges, that we are singular in the intensity of the problem in Canada, if not North America. We are overwhelmed by countless studies, reports, strategies and approaches, but let us be truthful here today. It's not working.

Our province has adopted a four pillars approach to alcohol and drug addictions: harm reduction, prevention, treatment and enforcement. Today I'd like to speak about a fifth pillar, a pillar called hope. I believe the San Patrignano model represents much-needed hope to address the drug addiction and homelessness that continue to cripple our cities and towns. Most devastatingly, it cripples our youth and our children.

I am dedicated to developing a treatment model focused on self-empowerment and self-sustainability, and I believe that San Patrignano is what we need to look at. Currently we depend on drug treatment models and more often than not have recovering drug addicts returning to the very environments from whence they came in the first place. We may be asking a lot of recovering drug addicts to expect them to return to a drug-infested community after a 21-day or 28-day treatment program.

[1040]

I believe that the current treatment options for drug addicts do not empower them to realize their self-potential or prepare them for a sober life in society. Many addicts come from a place of isolation and feelings of not belonging. Without the proper support and skills training and development, it is almost inconceivable how one is expected to go from a life of drugs and crime to becoming a sober, productive member of society. As we see every day on our streets, in our communities, the treatment options we have today are not getting the job done.

Founded by a wealthy landowner, San Patrignano is a community within a community, located in a rural Italian community. Like many other nations, Italy has experienced an increase in drug use during the past decade. The founder had a vision to create a strong environment of support where individuals are warmly welcomed to rehabilitate without any social, political or religious discrimination — in fact, with no prejudice or no judgment upfront. His vision was to create this rural community to help the drug addict. He soon discovered that once removed from the source of their addictions, addicts could discover the necessary life skills and treatment options for overcoming their addictions.

Yet it is not a mere treatment facility. It is a real home, a community in the truest sense of the word.

There are day care centres, schools, a hospital, houses, apartments, gardens and hundreds of small business enterprises that make quality crafts and goods. Again, it's not a sterile institution but rather a community — a drug-free community.

In this secure setting recovering drug addicts receive the widest range of support from a broad cross-section of people. As Europe's largest living drug treatment centre, the population is over 2,200 and is home to addicts from across the continent. Everyone at this facility, including the cooks, is an addict. Every recovering addict spends three to five years at San Patrignano, and they learn proper life skills and training to overcome their addictions through counselling, learning and accepting support from fellow addicts and staff.

In many respects the community runs on a similar model to Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, but the major difference here is that the addicts don't leave a meeting at the end of the day and go back to their drug-infested neighbourhoods. Instead, they receive 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week support from people who are also recovering addicts and who care for them.

Through work rather than harmful drugs, addicts have the opportunity to reclaim their lives. They have the opportunity to finally live drug-free — not less addicted or in a harm-reduced manner but drug-free. Another feature that makes this option even more appealing is that the rehabilitation doesn't cost them a penny. By being free of charge, a major barrier is lifted for most addicts that otherwise would have barred them from participating in getting the help they so desperately need.

B.C. would greatly benefit from the lessons and successes of this model. Unlike anything we have tried before, this model promotes a strong sense of self-sustainability and encourages personal growth as well as the importance of a strong community. Yes, San Pat receives public funding, but you will be surprised that it is less than 5 percent of the operating cost.

San Patrignano recently extended its services to addicted youth, giving them the support and life skills necessary to cope with their addiction issues but also to pursue post-secondary and/or trade education. Through the community's hard work they raise enough money to continue supporting the youth in the community if they leave for university.

D. Routley: I was going to search my dictionary for a definition of hypocrisy, but I think I've been given it by a government member who represents a government that has torn apart the services needed by these addicts and the homeless. If the member truly cared about the homeless and the addicted, he would stop the dreaming and start doing. He can start by convincing his own government to build public housing. He can start by convincing his own government to fund detox beds and to fund the mental health services that are needed.

As a private effort, the effort in San Patrignano may be laudable, but it may not be. There are many allega-

tions of coercion, torture and forced confinement in that community. The member points to a private effort which, if taken as a public effort, has terrifying internment possibilities.

[1045]

This heartless government has shown its inability to be trusted on the issues of human services. The real question is: why are there no detox beds? The real question is: why did this government cut the services like school lunches to children who live in poverty? Health care, income assistance, transportation issues — all of those are the things that support recovering addicts and the homeless to re-enter society.

This is a smokescreen. This is doing nothing but fawning on what's been done elsewhere by others, particularly without implicating any government role — either a government role in the circumstances that have created this crisis or a government role in piloting us out of those circumstances. We don't need a San Burnaby-ano. We don't need a San Downtown Eastside-ano any more than we need a San Lorne-ano.

What we need is housing — public housing. What this province needs is health care. What this province needs is care for the addicted and care for the mentally ill. We need our education and health services restored.

Above that, we need a government that cares about people — a government that governs for all British Columbians, not just their friends and insiders. We need a government that makes the assets of B.C. work for its people, not this pack of B.C. Liberal bailiffs who have liquidated the assets of this province that should be available to pay for those services we really do need in our communities. Those addicted and mentally ill who find themselves on the street, those poor B.C. children — all 23.8 percent of them — and their families who live in poverty need a government that will not abandon them and sell out their future.

Mr. Speaker, I'll pause now and ask you to correct the member behind me from Port Moody-Westwood because the shaking of his head is rattling and distracting me from my speech.

Deputy Speaker: Member, please take your seat. There is no reference to individuals, on any reference, to show respect for everyone in the House. Member, you do not refer to members by their personal name. Everything is referred to by riding. Please continue.

D. Routley: Most of all, British Columbians need us in this House to take their circumstances seriously and not offer up pabulum and excuses....

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Would all members of the House please give the right for the member to speak.

D. Routley: Not the pabulum and excuses of this government and not the government that will waive their circumstances as something someone else should fix.

This proposal could work in B.C., but it will work independent of this member and independent of this government. It will work, perhaps, because cooperative communities work. That's why it may work.

This member should concern himself with his and his government's role in shaping this landscape of desperation. No internment of the homeless or exile for the addicted will solve the social crisis that we face in British Columbia. The brutal cuts and heartless choices of this government are now reaping their sorry harvest.

Unless we deal with the root causes of this crisis, it will only worsen. The root cause is the B.C. Liberal government and their heartless cuts to the services for the addicted, for the homeless, for those impoverished in this province, for those left out of this narrow sectoral boom that this government bandies about as its own.

The only thing they're responsible for is not a made-in-North America housing boom but a made-in-B.C. poverty boom. With 23.8 percent of the children in this province living in poverty, how many more addicts and homeless will have to be exiled to San Burnaby-ano or wherever this member thinks they ought to be sent?

We need true measures to adapt to this crisis — authentic governance, leadership — not cuts, not brutality, not dishonour of the circumstances of those who suffer, and that's what has been offered by this member.

L. Mayencourt: I thank the member opposite for his uplifting words.

In addition to the abstinence-based 12-step programs that San Patrignano focuses on, they put a special effort into social, vocational life skills and boast a 75-percent success rate. Just for the members' information, in British Columbia addictions services are considered a success at 15 percent.

The work that the addicts undertake is part of the healing process. The work they do helps them discover or rediscover their talents and human potential and aids in their efforts to overcome their addictions.

[1050]

What's unique and essential to this model's success is the emphasis that the products they make are equally important in that they help to make the program sustainable. The honour and dedication of the community's products equal nothing that I've seen ever before. From fine arts and crafts to furniture collection to handmade quilting and food products, the production of goods at San Patrignano enables the community to raise 60 percent of its operating budget. That means it's almost self-sufficient.

Taking lessons from San Patrignano can offer us great benefits here in British Columbia. Within every dark cloud there is a silver lining. The unprecedented challenge that we face, that is presented by thousands of addicts, is also a wonderful opportunity. Our government has the opportunity to become a leader in treatment alternatives for our community's addicts. I believe now is the time to embark on a new journey.

We will need to find a rural piece of property in a community that will welcome a facility like San Patrignano. We need to find or create a well-meaning agency that will run the facility, and we need to plant the seeds of success by funding the startup of a community like this. We recognize that San Patrignano started as a small operation and slowly grew step by step. As such, I think it's important that we start with a small community here and give it the resources it needs to grow at a pace that works.

With an initial focus of up to 500 clients, I know that a pilot project to initiate a made-in-B.C. model is not only possible but is an essential step to developing treatment options for addicted and homeless community members. Just because one is homeless and addicted does not make one's potential to be productive and a contributing part of society any less important than anyone else's. Instead, it is their very struggle that could make our communities stronger and better as we work together to create a treatment where a success rate is something to celebrate and to be proud of.

I am deeply committed to this proposal, and I hope that all members, without any political rhetoric, will fairly consider it and the fact that we have to do better for our addicts and this is a model that might get us there.

ORGANIC FARMING IN B.C.

C. Evans: I rise today to speak on the subject of organic agriculture in British Columbia and, in particular, a particular organic farm, Formosa Nursery. I chose this format rather than question period to raise this issue because we have a problem that needs a solution more than we have "gotcha" partisan politics. I wish to present my argument in the hope that in the short run, the government would assist in coming up with a solution. It seemed to me this Monday morning format was best for that.

Organic agriculture is booming in British Columbia. We have seen more than 20 percent growth in the marketplace year after year in recent years. British Columbia is leading Canada somewhat. We have the largest percentage of organic farms in Canada right here in British Columbia.

Organics is a little bit complicated because a lot of organic food tends to come from Mexico, California and other places. We have worldwide reports that the average American meal — there aren't figures for Canada — travels between 2,500 and 4,000 kilometres before it gets to your table. So organics ought to also mean local.

The organic farmers I know, whether they grow fruit or run a dairy or produce blueberries, tend to come from either an ideological and spiritual background — wanting to take care of the earth — or a straight marketplace interest in doubling the value of their product when they sell it. Formosa Nursery in Maple Ridge is an example of both — folks with an ideological and spiritual connection to their land and

wanting to make it healthy and, also, with a desire to double the price of blueberries.

I'll give you a short history of Formosa Nursery. About 30-some years ago the chief research forester in Formosa moved to British Columbia to, he hoped, become a teacher at UBC. Because of language differences, troubles, he went to work at the Hammond sawmill, where he worked until he retired while he and his wife planted 10,000 blueberries on 43 acres of land out in Maple Ridge. They raised their family there.

One of the sons, Ting, who moved there from Taiwan when he was eight years old, decided he wanted to farm. He went to UBC, got an engineering degree, went back to the farm and married a woman from Taiwan, Risa Lin. They decided to take over the parents' blueberry farm and shift it to organic, thereby doubling the price point in the marketplace and taking care of the land.

[1055]

Everything was wonderful. When Risa Lin came, it went from just a blueberry farm to also an organic nursery situated in Maple Ridge on the northern side of a gazetted public road, which 30 years ago was planned to be an access to the new bridge going across the Fraser River.

Four years ago, in ways that are almost unfathomable, various decision-making bodies in British Columbia decided to move that gazetted, legal, free, already-paid-for, owned-by-the-Crown road 130 feet into the middle of the blueberry farm, bisect the farm and essentially wipe out the possibility of growing organic blueberries there.

In recent months the MLA from Maple Ridge and I and various other people have been trying to bring this issue to the attention of all the institutions and the government. I have invited the Minister of Agriculture, the Minister of Transportation, the chair of TransLink, the chair of the GVRD and the chair of the Agricultural Land Commission all to visit the farm.

TransLink blames the municipalities. It says: "Maple Ridge made me do it." The municipalities say: "Oh no, TransLink threatened us with increased costs if we put the road back out of the blueberries." The Agricultural Land Commission says, in writing, "Well, we made a mistake," and they gave a corridor rather than a line across Formosa farm. Every single institution in this story blames the other one. They are pointing fingers at the other one.

Finally, the municipalities and TransLink say: "We can't go back and move it 130 feet off the blueberries, because the construction company that owns the P3 contract will then charge us change orders. We can't afford the change orders, even though we acknowledge that we made a mistake."

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

When a whole bunch of institutions make mistakes and point at one another, nobody takes charge. Well, there is only one organization in British Columbia that

sits above everybody else, and that's cabinet, and in that cabinet — glory be, because you were there once, and I was there once — there is a Minister of Agriculture and a Minister of Agriculture's job. It isn't to defend transportation, like TransLink, or agricultural land, like the ALC, or municipal growth, like the municipalities. It is to defend farmers and food production. It's to promote the business of farming.

I'm here today to ask the Minister of Agriculture or his delegate — I gave five days' notice that this would be my question — to take some responsibility, act like a government, intervene and see whether or not it's possible to move a road 130 feet off Ting Wu and Risa Lin's blueberries and maintain the organic production at Formosa Nursery while we build the Abernathy connector to the new bridge across the Fraser River.

This is not a question of anyone being against development. This is development gone haywire and paving over some people's dream, which makes money. This is not a preservation-against-progress debate. This is about a business we are about to pave unless somebody chooses to intervene.

Hon. P. Bell: I certainly share the passion of the member for Nelson-Creston for organic farming. I think it has been one of the real success stories. I'm going to yield to the member for Delta South in just a moment to talk more about, specifically, organic farming. But I will just add, to the member, that he should understand clearly, having been the Minister of Agriculture at one point in time, that the Agricultural Land Commission is actually a quasi-judicial body. It makes decisions at an arm's length from government, and that's an appropriate model to actually have happen.

When cabinet decides to start interfering in quasi-judicial bodies, they very rapidly enter a slippery slope that is not one I care to engage in. I have been very clear all the way along that I will establish policy for the Agricultural Land Commission; I will not interfere with individual decisions. Certainly, it is the intent of this government to stay in that vein.

I will yield to the member for Delta South for the remainder of my time.

[1100]

V. Roddick: I also thank the member opposite for giving me this opportunity to rise and speak in the House once again about my passion: agriculture. Whether it's mainstream or organic, the future of agriculture lies in its capacity to ensure our survival. We need a rural, food-producing, environmental agricultural policy that will re-establish the link between the agricultural world and society at large.

In fact, society as a whole doesn't understand that its future depends on farmers. How can we reconnect society with the land and the food it produces? B.C. has taken the lead once again, this time putting an agricultural plan out for the province. Among other things, this plan will help establish a framework for communi-

ties to work together with various levels of government to deal with the enormous challenges facing all facets of the industry.

The member opposite has provided an excellent example this morning. Four municipalities — Surrey, Langley, Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge — plus TransLink and the Agricultural Land Commission have worked for three years with the Formosa group and the Hamptons. Despite coming to a conclusion and cheques being issued and cashed, we are still dealing with misunderstanding and controversy.

Our modern society the western world over loves green space but all too often doesn't hesitate to build highways designated to move us and our much-wanted consumer goods hither and yon. My riding of Delta South contains three villages and 25,000 acres of intensively cropped land bisected by three highways, two railways and a soon-to-be-extended Roberts Bank port access road. Despite these impediments our farmers, given proper — i.e., useful — infrastructure planning, can continue to operate and provide us with safe, local, delicious, nutritious food, both mainstream and organic.

Overall, B.C. has 33,000 acres of organic production. Delta South has a thriving sector that's 1,300 acres and, pardon the pun, growing: two small but productive processing packaging plants; a wholesale supply company; Olympic Dairy Products; a greenhouse that is going to be an organic-certified operation that actually puts taste first; an organic and heritage seed company; and the Institute for Sustainable Horticulture, a \$2.5 billion industry, which has been created at Kwantlen College.

We recognize the importance of markets to growers, so the Ministry of Agriculture and Lands is working with the Certified Organic Associations of B.C. on a national organic regulatory program to expand markets. Both our mainstream and our organic farms have to contend with the intense urban-agricultural divide. For example, our municipality, the corporation of Delta, has put in a chicane on one road to stop large farm machinery and trucks from accessing a certain route to a major pioneer farm.

A large subdivision was approved and built on farmland under the power lines in Tsawwassen, creating huge concerns due to planned upgrades to transmit more power to Vancouver Island. Delta South is facing a perfect storm with the upcoming treaty, with the expanding port, with highway and rail infrastructure improvements all directly impacting our number-one agricultural land and its farmers.

Our agriculture plan is due....

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Member.

V. Roddick: It's a very positive direction, because we still have to eat to live.

C. Evans: I thank the member for her comments. I thank the minister for his presence and his comments.

The member will remember, because I watched Ting Wu, the farmer that we're talking about, approach

her at the public hearings and ask for her assistance. I take her comments to mean she has investigated the matter and decided not to provide assistance.

[1105]

The minister just said that the Agricultural Land Commission is a quasi-judicial body and we, government, do not intervene. Fine. The Land Commission gave a corridor, a width of land — not a strip; a width of land — across Formosa Nursery as permission to TransLink. The corridor includes the Crown-owned option, and it goes 130 feet north to TransLink's option. The Land Commission already gave the minister permission to assist to make a decision.

I have a request of the minister. Thanks for being here. I call upon the Minister of Agriculture to appoint an independent auditor in one week to investigate the fully public information and report back to the minister with one question: has the TransLink process at Formosa Nursery been fair to the farmer, farming as a business and food production?

It would take one week, hon. Speaker, and I don't ask that the minister change any legal process.

I have thoughts for the Minister of Transportation, too. It's my understanding that the Minister of Transportation has already ordered a governance review of TransLink, which would imply to folks in our line of business that the gentleman may not have confidence in TransLink's governance already. So I have a request of the Minister of Transportation too: that he ask those people doing the governance review of TransLink to investigate what happened to Formosa Nursery precisely to find out whether the governance system at TransLink is competent.

Lastly, I have some thoughts for the Premier, who just returned from Hong Kong selling B.C. business. Obviously, in the five great goals — environment, food, health, business.... It all matters to the Premier. Given that issues of culture and language, I think, got in the way of solving this problem over the last four years.... I think people didn't hear one another. I think people didn't make an attempt to hear one another through issues of language.

Everybody is now saying: "Yeah, mistakes were made." It's even in writing from the Land Commission. Every municipal councillor you talk to will say, "Yeah, mistakes were made," but then they say: "We can't fix the mistakes because we'll have to pay change orders to the contractor because it's a P3 road."

I would ask the Premier to simply, quietly, away from the cameras, without telling me, phone the president of the contracting company that's about to pay Formosa Nursery and ask them if they wouldn't waive change order fees to move a road 130 feet to keep the issue out of this building and to keep trouble from intervening.

Hon. R. Thorpe: I call private members' Motion 13.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 13 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

Motions on Notice

FOUNDATION SKILLS ASSESSMENT TEST FOR B.C. STUDENTS (continued)

D. Cubberley: Mr. Speaker:

[Be it resolved that this House support the Foundation Skills Assessment as it provides valuable information on how well BC students are learning skills necessary to succeed in life.]

This motion has to do with endorsing the idea of foundation skills assessment, a motion that began to be canvassed some time ago in the House. As I was not part of that debate, I took the opportunity over the weekend to refresh my memory as to what members opposite had said about this matter and as to what members on this side had said about it — very interesting reading, as always.

I think I want to begin by indicating that I don't have a philosophical opposition to large-scale testing per se, but I do have serious questions about the priority of this kind of testing, the priority being placed on it as an "accountability" measure by members opposite and their emphasis on it as a kind of achievement that somehow solves a problem. I thought it would be worthwhile looking a little bit more closely at what it is that's being measured and whether it is in fact giving us a fair and useful indication of whole-person progress in our school system.

One of the obvious things that it's used for that I think should cause members opposite more caution than I was able to garner from their remarks is that it allows itself to be used by an institute like the Fraser Institute to rank schools and to characterize some as failing. This fits in quite well with the Fraser Institute's agenda of undermining and destabilizing the public school system because, of course, they don't like public initiative in any form, and successful public initiative is terribly troubling to members of the extreme right.

[1110]

What their intent is in using the numbers the way they do — and it's a very bad use of numbers — is to try to drive more and more people over to the private school system and to undermine confidence in public schools. Those results, as they produce them, are of course skewed against lower-socioeconomic-status schools and school populations and against rural school districts.

If there's no adjustment of the data that's presented, to reflect socioeconomic status of the catchment, then the rankings that come out of FSA results are utterly bogus as measures of effectiveness. If that can only be measured by an end point that's relative to a starting point, you cannot have a common starting point, because people come to school with different assets from different backgrounds. Therefore, a measurement of this kind — crudely used, as it is by the Fraser Institute

— in essence propagates a completely wrong picture of what's going on in public schools.

We need to keep the socioeconomic determinants of school populations in view whenever we're trying to assess success, because we know that kids from backgrounds with inadequate income are far less likely to flourish, on average, than kids from high-socioeconomic-status homes and neighbourhoods.

More analysis of the kinds of offsetting resources that are required to help those kids who start behind come up to the level of achievement that we want is required. That leads to a question about whether the FSA test results actually form part of a feedback loop of some kind. I want to get to that next, but I do want to just make members opposite aware.

It's very interesting to go to the Ministry of Education website, where it has a note on FSA. It says quite clearly that "attempting to rank schools or districts based on FSA results invites misleading comparisons that ignore the particular circumstances that affect achievement in each school." The only thing I would disagree with in that statement is that it doesn't mention ranking teachers and individual classrooms as similarly inviting misleading comparisons. I think that's from the ministry itself. It puts a huge question mark around how those numbers are used.

I want to come back to this idea of a feedback loop and whether the FSA test scores effectively constitute a feedback loop. A feedback loop, of course, is a way for information about performance to feed back into a system that leads to effective modification, improves the quality of a learning environment and cultivates positive change. Is that actually happening as a result of these? Well, I don't actually see any evidence that it is being used in that manner.

One of the things that I did surmise from talking to people — some of them were my colleagues and others, parents with kids in the school system and a couple of teachers — about this is that there is a feeling that it increases pressure on teachers to teach to the test, because they want their kids to do well and their school to be evaluated highly. Of course, what that can mean is that we are actually skewing classroom teaching so that the product of education isn't the thoughtful person with critical insights but somebody who knows what questions are going to be asked on a test and can reiterate the answers to those at the appropriate time.

On the flip side, I heard a very interesting thing from a parent who has three high achievers in the school system, two of whom declined from the earliest days to invest any energy whatsoever in preparing for the FSA. These are high-achievement students, and the reason they put no energy into it is because it does not contribute to their personal outcome in education. It has absolutely no bearing on how they do, so they went in and took a random approach to how they participated in what is supposed to be a measurement which is substantially accurate in what it measures.

I want to mention a couple of things that are intriguing. I don't sense any great amount of reflection on the content of this by members opposite. It's inter-

esting to me in two respects, and I would appreciate it if they would canvass this a bit in their comments later today.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

The marks that are given for reading comprehension relative to writing and numeracy are, across the system, categorically lower. They differ by anywhere from five to 17 marks on the scale. Reading comprehension is always the lowest of the marks that are given under FSA. It's interesting, because when we evaluate adult literacy, there are four factors that are evaluated.

[1115]

One of the critical factors is exactly the kind of thing that cannot be measured by this test, which is problem-solving ability. Problem-solving is one of the four domains in adult literacy and establishing proficiency levels, and those are the levels required for performance in a modern economy. Problem-solving involves goal-directed thinking and action for which no routine solution procedure is available. The understanding of the problem situation, and its step-by-step transformation based on planning and reasoning, constitute the process of problem-solving.

The challenge, of course, is that it is a critical skill for participation in the future, and it is not a skill that can be adequately measured with this kind of large-scale testing. I think that this places another question mark over it, and I would invite members opposite to consider it.

Back to the feedback loop. I sense, really, a passion for accountability on the other side, but within the narrowest of confines. To me, accountability is a broader thing than what can be measured in FSA assessments. It's something which also has implications for both the provision of resources and broad direction for the school system; i.e., it has implications for government.

It's interesting to see so much emphasis placed on accountability in the narrow sense and on the urging of approval of this approach to accountability at a time when, for the past five years, substantial cuts have been made to programs that affect outcomes in the public school system. I know members opposite are aware of this, and I'm not trying to rub their noses in it, but if you reduce the number of special assistants within the overall school system by close to one in five — 17 per cent — and if you reduce the number of teacher-librarians by close to one in five, and if you constrain resources enough that school districts begin to abandon reading recovery programs, you are obviously going to have some impact on the provision of literacy in the classroom.

That impact may be skewed even more heavily towards those of lower socioeconomic status. On average they bring fewer assets to school because they have received fewer assets in their home environment. They start behind, and if there are not the interventions that help them to catch up, if they aren't available in a timely fashion, then they stay behind. They become that part of the statistic which isn't so pleasing to our

eye, especially when we see that it's one in five or more who are not making it on reading comprehension.

I would just urge, when members opposite canvass this topic, that it not be so narrowly focused on an existing test, but that it be more an interpretation of what kinds of assessments need to be made and what kinds of feedback need to be provided — which would be useful to school districts, teachers, administrators and principals in helping to devise programs that optimize the number of people who flourish and achieve literacy — and that it not mask what is actually going on.

M. Polak: I've been involved in debates around the foundation skills assessment and various other forms of assessment for many, many years. One of the things I always find rather humorous — perhaps because I have an odd sense of humour — is that, in those discussions, one will invariably come to the point where those opposed to the use of the tests will rail against the harm they cause: the potential difficulties for students and the stress levels for teachers, etc.

Essentially, they'll oppose any form of standardized testing while, at the same time, they prepare their remarks on a subsequent agenda item in a meeting to reflect their concerns about students who are not performing well in certain subject areas. And what do they use to point that out? They use standardized testing results.

They say: "Well, look. We've got some problems here; we've got some problems there." The member opposite cites examples around reading comprehension, and we have some issues there. Well, you can't have it both ways. You can't on the one hand say that testing is harmful and terrible and that we shouldn't do it, and then on the other hand pull it out as your justification for the other arguments you want to make. It's one or the other. But what it does do is highlight for us that there is a valuable use for assessments of this kind.

[1120]

I want to talk a little bit about the use of data from a different kind of test, because perhaps it will allow us to pull back from some of the rhetoric thrown around about foundation skills assessments and understand why it is we test about anything in the first place.

Many years ago, when school safety began to become a more highlighted issue in the media, the school district that I was involved with decided to undertake a survey of all high school students in the district. It would be a very quick multiple-response questionnaire that would canvass students' views with respect to issues of safety around drug use, overcrowding, vandalism — all manner of issues that were top of mind.

Initially the response was one of concern: "How is this data going to be used? It may compare school to school, and then schools will be worried. You know, we really don't need to do this anyway, because we've got some pretty safe schools, and they're all right." The district went ahead and did it, was very careful with the use of the data and was able to bring that data back to individual school principals and PACs.

Here was the most important thing about that assessment data. You had school principals who had

gone on for years believing that their school didn't have a drug problem, a vandalism problem, a bullying problem or a problem with homophobia. Here they had data in front of them that said: "You know what? You've got a problem." It was a wake-up call to them, and it gave senior administration the ability to say to them: "You need to focus on this. You need to work on it."

As the years went on and the baseline data was extrapolated to form a trend over years, schools that targeted efforts were able to see successes. Not only did it wake them up to the issues that they needed to deal with, but it also gave them a feeling of accomplishment, a team atmosphere, when they were able to confront those problems head-on and see how they were doing in their school to improve that situation.

Much is the same with respect to assessing academic programs. It's very easy for people to be working in a system and believe, "We're fine; everything's all right; it's going well," and not be able to take some hard data and say: "Oh, you know what? In this area, we've got some issues."

I can recall many examples of schools that were able to sit down together and say: "We've noticed over time that this particular program isn't really working the way we thought it would, and maybe we should try doing something different with it." Why? Because they were able to look at data that returned results from that instruction on the foundation skills assessment, and they were able to track whether the changes they made were effective.

Many times people like to bring up the idea of high-stakes testing and compare this to what happens in the United States or in the U.K. Very often, in other places in the world, testing is used to deny opportunities for students. When it comes to the foundation skills assessment, the exact opposite is the truth. What happens is that you have schools that have never felt that they could rise above their initial standing.

The other piece of this that fascinates me is when those, who want to talk about the great equalizer that public education can be, want to deny the fact that those children from a low socioeconomic background have the same potential to achieve as everyone else. It's easy for us to say: "Of course, that school is doing poorly. They're from a poor neighbourhood."

Well, if you give them the tools, give them some of the data, help them along and help them to look at what it means for their school and what it means for their instruction, you can see schools rise above where they were. We saw it many times with schools that were from low socioeconomic areas. They were able to take data, sit the parents down and make the parents feel.... Even though they might have a low education themselves, even though they've never felt that they could be involved in a school, we wanted to bring them in. "We want to talk to you about helping your kids. We want to talk about designing programs."

There are schools around this province that have raised the level of performance of their teaching to those students, such that now those schools are proud

of their success. More importantly, they feel as though they can achieve. They're able to look at it and see it.

This, though, comes from a philosophy that has developed over the last, I guess, couple of decades in our schools that increasingly disconnects public education from what everyday life is all about. We're all familiar with the comments Bill Gates has made about public education and the fact that it is largely disconnected from what a student's real life is going to be outside of school, but it's the same for what parents and students expect in day-to-day life as well.

[1125]

A story from my long past. When my daughter was in elementary school, we attended an end-of-the-year ceremony. We had wonderful food and camaraderie with the parents, and then, of course, came the highlight of the evening. It was the awards ceremony. We were all looking forward to that, and everybody's got their idea about which grade 7 is going to win which award. Well, I mean, the tension was mounting, and they got to what was considered by the students to be the most popular award. It was the one everybody wanted to get. It was the citizenship award, a big trophy, and oh man, this was wonderful.

Well, we got to that point of the announcement, and I'm sitting with my daughter who's just on the edge of her seat hoping that she gets it, or one of her little friends. They call out a name, and she's disappointed, naturally. It's not her. That child goes up to the stage, and then they call out another name. Oh, I guess they're giving it to two students this year. Then they called out another name, and they called out another name. It soon became apparent that they were going to call the entire class up and give them a citizenship award.

Now, I'm sure the best of intentions were behind this, and the teacher was someone I well respect and admire — a good teacher — but the intention in doing it didn't have the desired effect. Instead of making all the students feel, "Wow, that's good; we're all good citizens, and we did really well," my daughter came back to her seat with her little certificate and dropped it on the ground. She said: "Even so-and-so got one." That award had no value to her, because the kid in the class that was always bullying kids, always poking them — the kid that everyone in that class looked to, to be treating them badly — won one as well. Because the whole class got one, the award had no value.

There is a point in time where, in our attempts to be kind to students, we miss the connection to what happens in real life. Oftentimes the Fraser Institute gets mentioned here, which is....

N. Simons: Not by us.

M. Polak: Well, it was by the member opposite during his statements.

That's another fascinating piece of assessment history in British Columbia, because when the Fraser Institute first started publishing its data and when it made the front page — I believe it was the Vancouver

Province — school districts in the public education system had a choice to make: how are we going to respond to this?

Certainly, there was a lot of concern amongst those who were in public education that this kind of ranking really took us away from what we were trying to do in schools. I recall a friend of mine, who had been involved in the public education system for years, saying: "You know, it's one thing to try and highlight for the public the issues around comparing this data and using it incorrectly. It's another thing to simply blind yourself to the fact that this is one of the top-selling issues of that newspaper every single year."

That tells you something. That tells you that there is a public and that there are parents who want to know how things are going in the school system. You can't close your eyes to that. What you can do is say: "All right, if that's the desire, if you want to know what's going on, then let's do this the right way."

Some school districts chose to publish individual school results and give them a context, to say: "That's all right. Okay, you want to know that, and we're concerned about how you use the data. We're going to contextualize it for you. We're going to give you a picture of a school. We're going to tell you what their ESL is like and what their aboriginal population is like. We're going to tell you what kind of programs they have at that school, and we'll tell you how their trend goes in terms of their scores, so that you know how that school is doing."

The public has a right to know. We have the responsibility to try and handle that data in a responsible manner. It's a challenge, no doubt, but it's one that we need to rise up to. It's one that we need to remember it's their right to ask for. The public can ask for accountability; parents can ask for accountability. When you talk about a test that, for students, will take place twice in ten years of their schooling, it's not something that overburdens them.

I can recall when I was in school — which isn't that long ago, I guess, I hope — a couple years ago. Actually, I was talking about this with my CA the other day, who does recall school a few decades ago. There was the daily spelling bee, and there was the weekly math quiz. I mean, we had tests coming out of our ears, but it was a part and parcel of what we did.

[1130]

Is that always the best way? Should we go back to that? That's not necessarily the case, but we tend to think that students are less resilient than they are. In the case of the awards, for example, we're worried about how they're going to feel. We're worried about making sure they're always uplifted, and we forget the fact that, for them, what's really high stakes is what happens when they get out of school.

We owe it to them to use assessments such as these to ensure that our curriculum is serving them well and to ensure that we're keeping tabs on whether or not we're delivering for them. That's the real high stakes — what happens to these kids when they graduate — and we want to make sure that we're behind them all the

way and that we have the guts to examine what we're doing and to reassess it when it's not working well.

C. Wyse: I'm indeed pleased to rise today to talk about the foundation skills assessment. To begin with, I'm going to work on an assumption that the actual test that I'm referring to, which is constructed, is valid. That test collects data on reading, writing and arithmetic in grades 4 and 7 for individual schools.

I want to start off my discussion from that very basic point, because my discussion is going to be around the actual use of the data. A caution that I start off with is that the scores I have just defined for you are not designed to reflect individual student achievement nor to evaluate teachers and teaching. The FSA is not an accurate measure of either individual student performance or teacher ability.

The member opposite just spent some time pointing out individual achievements, and this type of testing is not meant to deal with that type of situation. It's the use of the data as I mentioned that I wish to talk with you about, and share the insights that I would like to bring to this particular discussion.

The Fraser Institute compares individual schools and school districts. There is no reference in the FSA scores to the fact that they are closely related to socio-economic class. In the discussion that I've heard here in the House this morning, the suggestion has been made that individual schools should actually explain the makeup of their student population in order to tell their community the results of the FSA scores — again, not something that this particular collection of data, to my understanding, was ever intended to occur.

Tests are used to put pressure on administrators to improve scores by the Ministry of Education in spite of the fact that 40 percent of students do not write the FSA tests, in part as a result of the pressure to write the tests so that school score is improved. I would refer to an article to back up my point, a news article on November 10 of this year, where the Minister of Education announced the latest FSA results on Thursday.

According to the results of this year's FSA, B.C. students are doing better in math but could improve their reading and writing skills. Failure to examine reasons for low performance, which may include the lack of funding and at-risk students, caused some negative effects of this testing. I would like to draw reference to some information that the people who are working with the students all across British Columbia in actual fact have identified.

For the House's information, teachers report that they experience pressure to teach to the test, ignore important aspects of the curriculum, teach in less interesting ways, spend less time addressing the individual needs of students, spend instructional time on test practice. Teachers report that they see students who suffer from test anxiety, value tests more than learning, lose their motivation to learn if they do badly on tests.

[1135]

The FSA has been expanded into standardized testing. What I would like to draw to the House — what I

mean by that aspect of it — is that the former grade 10 FSA was replaced with provincial exams for grade 10 students here in British Columbia.

The increased fixation on test scores has led to criticism of increased use of standardized testing. A renowned writer and lecturer on education matters, Mr. Alfie Kohn, says — and I would like to quote some references — that ironically, the plague of increasing homework "has been unleashed in the name of improving schools. Invoking such terms as 'tougher standards,' 'accountability' and 'raising the bar,' people with little understanding of how children learn have imposed a heavy-handed, top-down, test-driven version of school reform that is lowering the quality of education."

He said that schools have been turned into "giant test-prep centres, effectively closing off intellectual inquiry and undermining enthusiasm for learning."

In closing, testing, when used as a tool to maximize learning and student success, is a valued and valuable tool in education. It is highly questionable, in my mind, that the foundation student assessment meets these goals in the present form that they are being used.

J. Yap: I appreciate this opportunity to participate in this discussion on one part of an area that is of great importance, great priority for the people of British Columbia, for our government and for us as legislators, and that is our public education system. I appreciate my colleague the member for Burnaby North for bringing forward this motion when he did.

First of all, I'd like to address a couple of points that were raised by our colleagues from the opposition. The member for Cariboo South made mention that our government has a fixation — I think that was the word he used — on testing. I would like to clarify. I believe our government has a fixation on excellence. We'll continue to pursue this on behalf of the people of British Columbia.

The member for Saanich South talked in his eloquent dissertation about cuts — that there were cuts. We do hear that from time to time, people who are of a mind to say that there have been cuts when actually public education — the K-to-12 system being the priority that it is for our government — has seen an increase in funding of \$2 billion in the last six years. We now have the highest level of K-to-12 education funding in the history of this province.

We have recently seen an increase in funding for textbooks to ensure that there are no textbook shortages in our schools. We all, of course, are very proud of the historic labour settlement with the BCTF, the teachers union, that was achieved earlier this year. That's the first time that's happened in a long time, even during the 1990s when that was an elusive goal.

We've also seen progress in addressing class sizes. We've also seen the Learning Roundtable, which has been a very useful tool, and the first-ever teachers congress to allow for a good level of interaction between teachers and government.

We also saw recently the parent congress, which was an opportunity for parents — who have great in-

terest and concern, of course, in their children's education — to meet directly with government to talk about the important issues in respect to public education.

We're here to talk today about the foundation skills assessment, which is a tool. It is one tool of many that are used in the process of our public education system here in British Columbia, which is renowned in terms of the quality of our education.

[1140]

As I'm sure members know, British Columbia's public education system is held out as one of the best in the world. Educators from other parts of the world come here to see how we do things. One of the tools in an array of tools that are used is the FSA, the foundation skills assessment. This is an opportunity for us to get a snapshot. That's all it is — a snapshot two times in ten years for us to see how students are doing and to have the opportunity to make adjustments as necessary so that we can continue to encourage improvement.

This FSA, which members opposite have difficulty with, covers the basics, the foundations, of education. In times past it used to be called the three Rs — reading, writing and arithmetic. The assessment covers literacy and numeracy, so that's reading, writing and mathematics.

As I said, it's administered two times, once in grade 4 and once in grade 7, for a total of 290 minutes in length. That's less than five hours, and this is spread over a number of days so that the impact — the disruption — is somewhat minimized.

The FSA is based on the B.C. public education school curriculum — a curriculum that is, again, held up as one that is to be admired around the world. Yes, we have heard of — and members in the opposition have talked about — some of the consequences that have arisen where there is some anxiety on the part of teachers and some students in going through these tests. But the tests, the assessments, are really intended to be a snapshot survey at a point in time over a long period of time as our students go through the school system.

Yes, it would be easy to say that some teachers would teach to the test. But really, the intention of the FSA is to provide an indication at two points in time of where our students are in these important foundation areas. If our teachers are following the curriculum and teaching their students in the normal course, they are in effect preparing their students for the FSA.

From parents that I've talked to in my travels as a member of this House, there is generally great acceptance that having these FSAs conducted in grade 4 and once again in grade 7 is a useful assessment. They're not the end-all or be-all, but they are a useful assessment among many assessments along the way in a child's education journey.

Parents want to know how their children are doing. As a parent myself, as many members of this chamber are, I want to know how my children are doing. My two children are still in the public school system. They're in secondary school now, but I remember well when they were travelling through the elementary school system.

One of the tools among many that provide feedback is the parent-teacher meeting. I remember attending many of these over a number of years where our two children, as many students do, take a lot of pride in showing how they're doing in school and sharing the results of their hard work and receiving the feedback from teachers.

[1145]

We get feedback from a number of ways. We get feedback from these parent-teacher meetings. We get feedback from the quality of work and the feedback that teachers provide as students undertake their projects and go through the school system. The FSA is one more tool among many to provide this feedback.

Now we know there are many voices other than members of the opposition who are against the foundation skills assessment. It's unfortunate that the teachers union is opposed. We know that every year there's an effort on the part of the British Columbia Teachers Federation to oppose the foundation skills assessment. That's unfortunate, because the FSA is not intended to be anything other than a snapshot. It is a snapshot at a point in time to help us get a sense of how our students, our learners, are doing and to provide the opportunity for corrective action to be taken.

The vast majority of parents are not persuaded by some of the naysaying that has happened. The number of students in grades 4 and 7.... The vast majority of them take part in this assessment.

The FSA is not — I repeat, not — an annual event in every grade that sometimes is referred to as high-stakes testing. This is an assessment that's done two times over a ten-year period to gain a point-in-time assessment of how our students, our learners, are doing in fundamental areas — in literacy and in numeracy.

The FSA supports the government's great goal to make B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent, and we want to achieve this by the year 2010. As I mentioned, B.C. is seen as a leader in improving student achievement. This is through our curricula, our programs and processes such as the FSA.

Accordingly, I support this motion. I hope that the majority of my colleagues in this chamber will also support this motion.

D. Chudnovsky: Mr. Speaker, it's great to see you — lovely to see you this morning. We should do this more often.

I never cease to be amazed that the only people in the province who seem not to have noticed that there have been dramatic program cuts in British Columbia schools since 2001 are the members of the government caucus.

Students have noticed. Parents have noticed. School trustees have noticed. The press has noticed. The pundits have noticed. The teachers have noticed. The only ones who don't notice that there have been tremendous cuts in programs in schools across the province are the people in the government caucus. It's amazing. They should know better.

This morning we're to talk about evaluation and assessment of students. I think that the evaluation and

assessment of students is a fundamental part of the work we do in our schools. That's why we have to think about it very carefully. Some folks don't think about evaluation and assessment very carefully.

I've been a teacher for more than 30 years. I remember every fad, every innovation and reform that was going to revolutionize teaching and learning. I remember when film strip projectors gave way to educational movies and on to television. I took a course at the faculty of education at U of T many years ago. The entire course was on overhead projectors and how that was going to revolutionize the schools.

[1150]

I helped organize the first Commodore 64s in my school. I remember open-area schools, new math, several versions of back to basics, insistence on phonics. Each of these had some value for students, but each also carried within itself the seeds of dogmatism and faddism, and so it is with standardized tests. They've become a fad, a new religion.

People who know very little about how students learn salute standardized tests. They worship standardized tests. They say to us that standardized tests are the answer to all of our educational challenges. But what do these tests really tell us? Stanford University professor Elliot Eisner writes that tests should be useful in predicting what students will do in other situations. They should have predictive validity. The trouble with standardized tests is that what they predict best are other test scores. Put another way, the most important thing that students learn from writing standardized tests is how to write standardized tests.

What is the purpose of assessment and evaluation of students? It's to find out what students are good at and what they struggle with, to analyze each of these and to determine how best to help the students improve. But standardized tests are not diagnostic. They are not designed to identify specific weaknesses of specific students and to determine ways to remediate them. They measure what is easy to measure — lower-order recall — and penalize higher-order thinking like analyzing, synthesizing, forming hypotheses and problem-solving.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

I am going to mention the Fraser Institute, because there was a careful study done of the institute's so-called report card of schools based on the same standardized tests, and here's what it showed us. The results conclude that if you want to do well on standardized tests, here's what you have to do.

First, choose your parents carefully. They should be affluent and speak English as a first language. Second, attend a highly academic, university-oriented school in a wealthy urban centre but not too inner-city. Third, get into a private school if you can afford it and if they'll take you, preferably one that's a single-sex private school. Fourth, avoid schools with a wide range of programs — vocational, arts, special education, technology, English- and French-as-a-second-language.

Most importantly, if you want to do well on the FSA test, stay out of isolated rural communities.

Those are the things that we learn about these tests. In other words, we can predict the results of the standardized tests on a schoolwide basis very accurately. If you ask teachers — and there are colleagues here who are teachers — they'll tell you that they can predict with a very high success rate how individual students will do on standardized tests. It's easy. Standardized tests — for all their enormous costs, disruptions to the school program and stress induced for both students and teachers — tell us almost nothing that we don't already know.

Of course we must use and value tests and quizzes and exams but also oral reports and student demonstrations, skits and other physical activities. We certainly need to assign and evaluate written reports and essays, but we must also nurture and assess leadership skills, cooperative processes, self-discipline and self-expression. We need to teach computational skills, grammar and scientific principles, but not forget to support and assess critical thinking, the development of citizenship skills, and aesthetic performance and sensibility.

What all of this requires is respect and support for classroom teachers working with students on a day-to-day basis. Authentic assessment is only possible if the resources are available for teachers to deal with students as a group of children of more or less the same age and developmental level but also as individuals with specific strengths, weaknesses, abilities and challenges.

Most importantly, we need to remember that our biggest task in assessing the progress of our children is not to convince ourselves that some number on some test that fundamentally measures test-taking ability is particularly important. We must remember that our students are not test-taking machines and that turning them into fodder for international testing corporations is neither necessary nor particularly useful. Rather, our children are citizens in the making. Their needs, desires and passions are diverse and wide-ranging. Our evaluation tools must therefore be just as wide-ranging and diverse.

[1155]

J. Rustad: I understand the hour is getting late, but I would like to start some of my comments and then reserve the rest of my comments for, hopefully, a day when we get to continue this debate.

The question is — and it seems to be the big debate around the House — the FSA results. Why are they useful? Why are they particularly important? I want to give an example of a student who enters kindergarten, goes through the first three or four years of education, gets into about grade 5 or 6, and suddenly a teacher sits down with a parent and says: "We have a challenge with this student. This student is not reading at the appropriate level."

The question that the parent inevitably asks is: "How come I wasn't notified of this before? Why wasn't I given an opportunity to be able to develop this and move along?" The answer, quite frankly, is that those tests weren't always available. The ability to measure the success of a student wasn't always available in how things progressed.

I just want to go back and talk for a second about history. FSA was first pilot-tested in 1999 by the opposition here, who happen to think that this is a bad thing in the government. It was modelled after what was called PLAP, the provincial learning assessment program, which was implemented and used for many, many years.

Since 1999 and since the time now — it has been fully implemented in year 2000, and we'd be moving it forward.... Why is this test so useful? It isn't for what the opposition seems to like to think it's for, which is perhaps to rank schools amongst schools in the province. What it's useful for is for school planning councils to be able to sit down and look at the progress that students are making in certain areas and at where they can customize and change the focus within a school so that those students can receive the kind of education that we'd all like.

Mr. Speaker, I have many more things that I would like to carry on with, but noting the hour, I would like to reserve the rest of my comments.

J. Rustad moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. R. Thorpe moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

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