



Second Session, 38th Parliament

REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
**FINANCE AND
GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Kamloops

Tuesday, September 26, 2006

Issue No. 28

BLAIR LEKSTROM, MLA, CHAIR

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**SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

Kamloops
Tuesday, September 26, 2006

- Chair:* * Blair Lekstrom (Peace River South L)
- Deputy Chair:* * Bruce Ralston (Surrey-Whalley NDP)
- Members:*
- * Iain Black (Port Moody–Westwood L)
 - * Harry Bloy (Burquitlam L)
 - Randy Hawes (Maple Ridge–Mission L)
 - * Dave S. Hayer (Surrey-Tynehead L)
 - * Richard T. Lee (Burnaby North L)
 - * John Horgan (Malahat–Juan de Fuca NDP)
 - * Jenny Wai Ching Kwan (Vancouver–Mount Pleasant NDP)
 - * Bob Simpson (Cariboo North NDP)

**denotes member present*

- Clerk:* Kate Ryan-Lloyd
- Committee Staff:* Dorothy Jones (Committees Assistant)

-
- Witnesses:*
- Trish Archibald (Chair, Kamloops Women's Resource Group Society)
 - Jane Birkbeck
 - Tony Brumell
 - Michael Crawford (Thompson Rivers University)
 - Cynthia Davis (Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre)
 - Jaimie Drew (President, Kamloops Chamber of Commerce)
 - Dr. Thomas Friedman (President, Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association)
 - Dawn Hatch (Kamloops Women's Resource Group Society)
 - Dr. Wendy Hulko (Aging and Health Research Centre)
 - Kathleen Kendall (Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society)
 - Charlene LaCombe
 - Nathan Lane (Thompson Rivers University Students Union)
 - Natalie Lidster
 - Lauren McCusker
 - Terry Monteleone (President, Thompson Rivers University Students Union)
 - Louise Richards (Executive Director, Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society)
 - Heather Robinson (Kamloops Women's Resource Group Society)
 - Jo Rothenburger (Executive Director, AIDS Society of Kamloops)
 - Anita Strong (Chair, Council of Canadians — Kamloops Chapter)
 - Ron Tenisci (Tenisci Piva Chartered Accountants)
 - Garry Worth
 - Jasmin Wright (Kamloops Women's Resource Group Society)
 - Charlene Yow

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MINUTES

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES



Tuesday, September 26, 2006
9:00 a.m.
Colonnade Room, Coast Canadian Inn
339 St. Paul Street, Kamloops

Present: Blair Lekstrom, MLA (Chair); Bruce Ralston, MLA (Deputy Chair); Iain Black, MLA; Harry Bloy, MLA; Dave S. Hayer, MLA; John Horgan, MLA; Jenny Wai Ching Kwan, MLA; Richard T. Lee, MLA; Bob Simpson, MLA

Unavoidably Absent: Randy Hawes, MLA

1. The Chair called the Committee to order at 9:04 a.m.
2. Opening statements by Mr. Blair Lekstrom, MLA, Chair.
3. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions:

- | | |
|--|---------------------|
| 1) Kamloops Chamber of Commerce | Jaimie Drew |
| 2) Thompson Rivers University, School of Social Work and Human Service | Michael Crawford |
| 3) Council of Canadians, Kamloops Chapter | Anita Strong |
| 4) Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society | Louise Richards |
| | Kathleen Kendall |
| 5) AIDS Society of Kamloops | Jo Rothenburger |
| 6) Kamloops Women's Resource Group Society | Trish Archibald |
| | Heather Robinson |
| | Dawn Hatch |
| | Jasmin Wright |
| | Ron Tenisci |
| 7) Tenisci Piva Chartered Accountants | |
| 8) Jane Birkbeck | |
| Natalie Lidster | |
| Lauren McCusker | |
| 9) Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre | Cynthia Davis |
| 10) Garry Worth | |
| 11) Thompson Rivers University Students' Union | Nathan Lane |
| | Terry Monteleone |
| 12) Charlene Yow | |
| 13) Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association | Dr. Thomas Friedman |
| 14) Aging and Health Research Centre, TRU | Dr. Wendy Hulko |
| 15) Charlene LaCombe | |
| 16) Tony Brumell | |

4. The Committee adjourned at 12:58 p.m. to the call of the Chair.

Blair Lekstrom, MLA
Chair

Kate Ryan-Lloyd
Clerk Assistant and
Committee Clerk

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2006

The committee met at 9:04 a.m.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Good morning, everyone. I would like to welcome you to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services hearings, held here in Kamloops today. Before we start, just some business that I will go over.

My name is Blair Lekstrom. I am the MLA for Peace River South, and I have the privilege of chairing the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

Each year we are tasked, through legislation, to take the prebudget consultation paper that is submitted by the Minister of Finance no later than the 15th of September and tour the province and speak to British Columbians about what their priorities are on the upcoming budget for next year and the years out. We then are asked by the Legislative Assembly to submit a report back by no later than the 15th of November, at which time the Minister of Finance uses that document as one tool in developing next year's budget.

Today's meeting. We have a number of different avenues that the public can participate in. Today we have the oral hearings here, as well as at 13 other locations around the province that we will tour before we complete our job. As well, you can go on line. You can go and do the questionnaire. You can actually pick up the prebudget paper here and mail it in. You can also put in written submissions. All presentations are given equal weighting, whether you present in person or whether you put forward a written submission.

[0905]

Also, the format that we utilize for our public hearings is 15-minute presentations: ten minutes for the presenter with five minutes remaining for members of the committee to ask questions, if there are any. If you do have to use the full 15 minutes, the only challenge is that there's no time for questions, but some presenters opt to do that as well.

Before we begin, I am going to ask the other members of the committee to introduce themselves.

D. Hayer: Good morning. My name is Dave Hayer, MLA for Surrey-Tynehead.

I. Black: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Iain Black. I'm the MLA for Port Moody-Westwood.

J. Kwan: Jenny Kwan, Vancouver-Mount Pleasant.

H. Bloy: Harry Bloy, MLA for Burquitlam.

B. Ralston: (Deputy Chair): Bruce Ralston, Surrey-Whalley. I'm vice-Chair of the committee.

B. Simpson: Bob Simpson, Cariboo North.

R. Lee: Richard Lee, MLA for Burnaby North.

J. Horgan: John Horgan, MLA for Malahat-Juan de Fuca.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Also joining us, on my left, is Kate Ryan-Lloyd, who is our Committee Clerk, as well as Dorothy Jones, who you've gone by at the registration desk.

Also, all of our hearings are recorded and transcribed as well as broadcast live on the Internet. We have staff from Hansard joining us, who have been touring with us. Joining us are Wendy Collisson and Rob Froese. So again, thank you for the work that you do.

This is a great opportunity for British Columbians to present their priorities and ideas on what they think the province should be looking at for priorities, where new money could possibly be spent, where streamlining and efficiencies could be found in the minds of people. It's our job as a committee to listen to British Columbians, not to engage in debate. We all, I'm sure, have numerous ideas on how we can improve our province.

With that, we are going to begin this morning. I'm going to call our first presenters, who are the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce, and joining us is Jaimie Drew.

Good morning, Jaimie. Welcome to the committee.

Presentations

J. Drew: Good morning. To begin, I just want to thank the committee for coming to Kamloops. I think this is very important that you're doing this, and we thank you for keeping our community in mind, going around the province.

Today I'm presenting views representing over 700 members of the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce. I'll begin my preamble.

The Kamloops Chamber of Commerce is very satisfied with how things have been progressing economically in the province this year, because there could be significant problems looming on the horizon. With the U.S. slowing down significantly in new housing starts, etc., we know that it could have an impact on us eventually.

We feel that instead of asking for tax breaks and more program expenditures, the government should instead hold a steady course in the coming year. The Kamloops Chamber of Commerce is pleased to present the following three points for consideration for the government's 2007 budget.

The first point is debt reduction. The government should direct the surplus, along with all unused reserves, to debt reduction. The nature of surpluses are such that it is dangerous to direct these to program spending as they simply increase government spending, thereby removing our ability to cushion the economy against unforeseen challenges. The benefit of debt reduction is that it actually frees up sustainable revenue that the government can reinvest without risking the economy.

We would recommend the government take debt repayment out of the normal budget process by intro-

ducing legislation that will ensure that debt repayment is removed from the political interference and short-term priorities overriding the importance of reducing the debt burden we are leaving our children — by laying out our long-term reduction strategy.

I think that really concerns everybody as an individual too — the legacy we're leaving for our children and their children afterwards. If we don't address the debt reduction, that's ultimately where it's going to land.

The second point is fiscal responsibility of government. Following the release of the provincial government's first quarterly report for '06-07, the Finance Minister announced a stronger economic outlook for 2006 that will result in a surplus rising to \$1.2 billion, up from an anticipated \$600 million. The improved economic performance, which has also seen revenue rise by over \$1 billion, is offset by the identification of significant challenges that lay ahead, many of which are outside the province's ability to control.

Minister Taylor was here addressing our chamber yesterday, and she talked about the natural gas volatility and just how the changes of a dollar or two each way cost the government millions of dollars. So we know that's really out of your control. The natural gas has, alone, cost \$774 million and is down from what we forecast it would bring in this year.

[0910]

The province also sounded a note of caution regarding the forest industry before we really understand the true implications of the softwood lumber deal.

From the chamber's perspective, the biggest issue of note is that government spending has increased by \$722 million above Budget 2006. While much of this can be attributed to higher forest fire costs and incentive payments for public sector pay negotiations, the report indicates that increased spending by school districts, universities, colleges and health authorities were higher than anticipated.

Further to this increase in spending, the government indicated that there are significant further cost pressures on spending being identified by all health authorities. From the chamber's perspective it is worthy of note, as with an increased surplus will come an increased pressure on government to increase spending. As such, a cornerstone of the chamber's comments must focus on the need for prudent fiscal management. While the government is now legally committed to balance the budget, we must be clear that that does not mean they can increase program spending above the rate of inflation.

Our last point is: doubling tourist revenues by 2015. We've already submitted a resolution through the B.C. Chamber of Commerce. Basically, the chamber calls on the government to amend provincial legislation to introduce a PST exemption for in-room consumables. The gist of that is: if we buy new furniture for the hotel — for my hotel here — we pay PST on it, and then when a guest stays in the room, they pay PST. So the government is actually getting a double hit of PST. What we're trying to say is that we should get a PST exemption for in-room consumables, and we've given you a handout to explain that in more detail.

Those are the three points from the Kamloops Chamber of Commerce.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much, Jaimie. I'm going to look to members of our committee to see if they have any questions on what you've presented here this morning.

B. Simpson: Thanks, Jaimie, for the presentation. As you can imagine, we're hearing similar presentations from chambers of commerce throughout the communities that we're going to. We're also hearing mixed messages on debt reduction. We've had other business groups come to us and talk about the fact that that needs to be over a longer period of time and that you may have to use some of the surplus to stimulate some economic activity or to address things like infrastructure, deficits and so on.

You've raised the issue of the legacy that we're leaving to our children. I'm wondering if the chamber has done any work around the other kinds of legacies that are being left. We hear lots about infrastructure deficit in the order of magnitude of tens of billions of dollars. As you're aware, we're starting to lose conventions in Victoria and Vancouver because of what's happening on the streets down there with homelessness and poverty and petty crime and so on.

You've indicated the forest sector, and we have a huge forest health issue. So is there a debt strategy where we can engage in both addressing the debt long term and addressing some of these other priority issues that if we don't address, we're leaving a legacy to our children in that area as well? Has the chamber done any work to look at it more holistically that way?

J. Drew: It's always a fine line when you look at, on the one hand, the current situation and, on the other hand, the debt. I guess the chamber's point of view is that if you take the here and the now and you look at all the problems in society, we could spend all of our surplus and not service the debt one iota. But I guess that's what a proper budget does. It looks at the needs of the province.

The infrastructure costs. From the chamber's point of view, most of those are borne by the city. I know that in Kamloops our city is under great pressure, but they also understand that it's the city's responsibility. They're looking for provincial help. They're also looking for federal funding to help that. So from our point of view, we understand the difficult line. Where do you draw the line on helping society and paying back the debt? But we certainly see the importance of paying back the debt.

J. Horgan: That was my question.

D. Hayer: A very good presentation. We've been going to chambers. They have one vision, and they represent hundreds of members and thousands of workers. Then we have members from students societies. They have a different vision. They said: "Use the

extra surplus you have for tuition fees and other parts." And your point of view. You're saying: "Pay down the debt." There are also budget people that have recorded the questions, sort of talking about infrastructure.

Is there any possibility...? Maybe your chamber can fill that out, too — those four questions — and present us an e-mail which has a little more detailed information than this.

[0915]

J. Drew: About the infrastructure and needs of the province?

D. Hayer: Yes.

J. Drew: We'll certainly look at that, and we can get back to you on that.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, Jaimie, I see no further questions from members of the committee. I want to thank you for taking time out of your day and being our first presenter here today. As always, all presentations are given full consideration by this committee.

Our next presentation this morning is from the Thompson Rivers University school of social work. Joining us is Michael Crawford.

Good morning, Michael.

M. Crawford: Good morning. Welcome to Kamloops. It's a pleasure to have you back, as we welcome you every fall, it seems, for the last number of falls. I want to thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee, for giving me the opportunity to present to you today.

I'm going to talk about poverty and welfare policy. I provided copies of my report, which are being handed out to you today.

The economy is actually doing quite well in British Columbia. Statistics Canada reported last May that our provincial GDP is increasing annually at a rate of almost 3.5 percent. According to that Stats Canada report, the economy began rebounding in '99 when the world demand for our natural resources increased dramatically and commodity prices shot up as Asia began recovering from the economic troubles of '97.

Their demand for B.C. resources, notably metals and coal, increased such that B.C. exports to Asia have now surpassed those to the United States. That's a good thing for British Columbia — that we're no longer so dependent upon our southern neighbour for exports, although we're terribly dependent as is, but less.

We produced a record surplus budget after three quite record deficits over the last number of years. Carole Taylor said here yesterday that we're on our way to producing a balanced budget, so that's all very good news for British Columbia, although you know it has produced some significant problems for British Columbia: skyrocketing houses, critical labour shortages in some areas of the province. We often hear discussion about inadequate transportation systems,

health care demands and so forth — most of it a result of increased economic activity in the province.

British Columbia is doing well, but unfortunately, not all British Columbians are doing well. Before I move on to discuss poverty, I want to say that I believe each and every one of you has in their hearts the best interests of British Columbia. I wish, as you go about your work as MLAs, that you ask yourself if what you do every day is respectful and if it is likely to achieve some measure of equality for all citizens of this province.

In this province we purport to care about those who find themselves in situations of disadvantage and about those marginalized from the mainstream, but sadly, we set severe limits on our caring. In my work as a social work educator, we refer to this rather harsh approach as "delivering social minimums." As the term suggests, the state offers a minimum amount of resource possible to the person in need, in the belief that being more generous would not be tolerated by what some consider more productive citizens.

More to the point for social conservatives, social minimums are thought to support independence by forcing recipients into the low-wage labour market and preventing long-term dependence on welfare. People on welfare are among the poorest in this province and receive certainly no more than the social minimum.

The Hon. Claude Richmond, the MLA for Kamloops and Minister of Employment and Income Assistance, when challenged about low welfare rates or increasing numbers of poor in B.C., is often quoted as saying: "Our government believes the best way to tackle poverty is to build a strong economy."

Well, in the middle of what StatsCan calls "the west coast boom," we have desperate and gut-wrenching poverty. The benefit of a hot economy is not spread evenly among the citizens of this province.

A recent study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives using Stats Canada data shows that B.C. is home to the largest wealth gap in Canada. In fact, the report says that the richest 10 percent of family units in B.C. have a combined wealth of more than \$231 billion, or more than half of all personal wealth in this province; that is, the top 10 percent have more than half the combined personal wealth in the province.

Additionally, there are more millionaires per capita in British Columbia than in any other province in Canada. Also, according to StatsCan, between 1996 and 2004 the gap in average aftertax income widened between the lowest- and the highest-income families. The gap widened from \$82,000 to \$102,000 over the course of six years.

[0920]

Sadly, in the middle of seemingly great riches nearly one in four children in this province lives in poverty. Not only has this government paid too little attention to this problem, but when they have, in some cases they have made things worse.

Welfare rates in British Columbia are abysmally low. You've probably heard this before, but for the record, a single person expected to work receives a

maximum of \$510 a month. Some of that is for accommodation, and \$6 a day of that is for everything else a person needs. By comparison, this amount is only 21 percent of the 2005 average income for single, employable people in British Columbia. Single, employable people in Newfoundland and Labrador, by comparison, receive 26 percent more on welfare than their counterparts in British Columbia.

The same can be said for single, employable mothers with one child. They receive \$969. This amount is less than half of the 2005 average income for lone-parent, one-child families in British Columbia. Again, by comparison to Newfoundland and Labrador, this type of welfare recipient would be 16 percent better off there than in British Columbia.

With the exception of people with disabilities, the welfare rate has not increased in British Columbia for 12 years. With simple inflation averaging more than 2 percent per year, welfare recipients are losing ground quickly.

According to the National Council of Welfare, single, employable welfare recipients in B.C. have had a drop of 24 percent in their welfare income between 1994 and 2005. A single parent with one child has had a drop of 18 percent in their income in that same period.

Welfare rates for most categories of assistance are well below the low-income cutoff that Statistics Canada created, and many are less than half of that. Not only are welfare rates deplorably low, obtaining welfare has become much more difficult.

Welfare rolls across the country have been shrinking since the mid-1990s. Beginning in 2002, British Columbia took things a step further. Although there are many noteworthy changes — such as the failed 24-page application for people with disabilities, the loss-of-earnings exemption that discourages people from working and a two-year time limit on welfare that almost everyone in the province except the government could simply see was wrong-headed — I'll reserve my comments to only two of the changes.

Shamefully, there is now a minimum three-week wait period before a person can even apply for welfare in this province. People who may have expended their last money and have used up the goodwill of their friends and family, go to the welfare office only to find that they must wait a minimum of 21 days before even applying for the benefit. The wait is discouraging and disheartening.

Applicants can also be denied welfare income because they can't prove that they have supported themselves for two consecutive years. They must prove that they have had at least \$7,000 of employment income or 840 hours of paid work in each of the two years.

Besides being cruel and heartless, these two measures combined are the most effective way of cutting down the welfare roll, and one suspects that's why these measures were brought in.

In the year following implementation of these regulations there was a 40-percent drop in the number of applicants actually receiving welfare. In other words, the initial reduction of people on welfare didn't come

from people being put into jobs, as this government often states; it has come from preventing people from entering the system in the first place.

Starting with the last two issues first, the policies requiring a minimum three-week wait and two years of independent support must be repealed. These requirements simply deny citizens the right to a basic income by preventing their entry into the system. My main point, though, is this: welfare rates in British Columbia must rise — and rise significantly. Not only is this the morally correct course, but it simply makes good economic sense.

The people of B.C. support an increase in welfare rates. An Ipsos-Reid survey earlier this year found that when people were given specific information about how much people on welfare receive, three-quarters of the respondents supported an increase in rates, and almost one-half of all respondents strongly supported an increase.

If you doubled welfare rates for a lone parent with one child, you would bring them to the poverty line. Doubling the welfare rate for lone parents with one child only brings them to the low-income cut-off point, and they would be on par with the median income for their group in 2005. You'd have to triple the welfare income of single employable recipients, and that would still leave them just short of the poverty line.

[0925]

Sociologists and others have been clear that poverty is a significant correlate for poor health, mental illness, child and woman abuse, alcohol and drug addiction, criminal activity, homelessness, unemployment and so many other social ills. Do we increase the income of the most disadvantaged in our province, or do we pay the price and build jails, treatment centres and other remedial institutions? Sadly, it seems to this point that we have chosen the latter, but I know we can do better.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much, Michael, for your presentation here to our committee. I'm going to look to members of our committee to see if they have any questions regarding what you've put before us today.

I. Black: Thank you for the presentation. I'll be candid and say that I struggled with the vast majority of it, both from how the numbers have been cherry-picked and your characterization of some of the events of the last several years.

Having said that, the key message within it, I suppose, is that you'd like to see welfare rates raised. Let me focus on that in my question.

This exercise is about establishing priorities for what we do with the resources that we have as a province. Whenever we spend in one area, it means we are not spending in another. So to give us a sense of the priorities on this one, where would you...? First of all, do you have any sense of what it would cost to raise the welfare rates, as a gross number? Assuming that you do, where would we spend less? That's perhaps a little bit too direct, but can you give us a sense of where in the priorities of what government does for people —

whether it's health care, social services, education, etc. — we would find that balancing to achieve what in isolation is a noble notion of raising the welfare rates?

M. Crawford: I think it's more than just a noble notion. I think it's a fundamental requirement, because it supports a basic human right.

I. Black: Fair enough.

M. Crawford: Your characterization of it as a noble idea is something that I struggle with. I think that when government establishes a priority — the fact that people have a fundamental human right to a basic income — then you need to ask yourself: what should that basic income be? I think what I've done here is tried to point out to you that when a single employable male receives from the state one-third of the money to bring them to the poverty line, and a lone parent with one child receives less than half of the money that's required to bring them to the poverty line, that's not meeting people's basic human rights.

In answer to your question — where would that money come from? — I'm saying to you: establish that as a priority, and you'll find that money. This government has established other priorities — 2010 and other priorities — and you seem to have found the money. Establish income security as a basic human right for people in this province, and you'll find the money.

You'll save money too. My other point is that you'll save money. You won't be spending all this money on remedial institutions.

B. Simpson: You've argued both the moral side of this as well as the economic side. I note that you're with the school of social work. Can you direct us to any studies that have indicated that a dollar invested in this kind of programming saves how much in terms of the institutions that you need to build or the health care impacts or whatever? Again, as Iain has pointed out, our job is to look at balancing the range of asks and budget cuts and tax cuts and so on. It would be helpful to us if we had someone who had substantiated some of the economic benefits from addressing this, let alone the moral imperative to do it.

M. Crawford: A good point. I can certainly point this committee to lots of very well-credentialed research that establishes the correlation between the things that I've talked about and poverty — mental illness, unemployment, child abuse, woman abuse and so forth. That data has been known, and well-known, for decades, actually. It's not new. What we need, in fact, is a good experiment where we invest in children.

[0930]

I don't think there is one of you there who would say, "I think it's okay that we have homeless people," or child abuse or woman abuse or alcohol and drug addiction. But who's going to take the bold stand to invest in families so that families can raise their children and give their children the same opportunity that

you give your children? There's a point for you. Give everybody in this province the life that you have, and my guess is that we'll see a tremendous downturn in social ills.

B. Simpson: If I could, just a quick follow-up. If there's a summary document or something that's a cogent, tight case, it would be helpful to us if you forward it to the Clerk's office so that we've got something to take a look at.

D. Hayer: I understand you pointed out the rates have not gone up in ten years. I can tell you this much. In my constituency many people say: "People on social services — the ones who need the help, who cannot work — please give them fair rates of welfare. On the other hand, the ones who can work, please try to find jobs for them."

I have gone to some of the programs, though, where they seem to be happy working in construction. Do you think it's a good idea if we can find a job for them — encourage people to get involved in the economy and working rather than being on welfare?

M. Crawford: Sure. I don't think there's any doubt that most people on welfare, if they're employable and not disabled, would prefer to be working. They would prefer to be working at good-waged jobs — you know, wages that support their families. I think that's their preference. That certainly is my preference for them as well.

My point in presenting some of this data to you is that we simply don't know what the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance has done. Their claims that all these people have found some sort of meaningful work in the province have not been substantiated. So far as I know, we haven't been able to secure that data from the ministry to have a look at it. What is more likely the case is that we're stopping people from getting onto welfare, and that's why the welfare rolls have declined. So yes, I support employment — absolutely.

J. Kwan: Thank you for the presentation. I actually come from a riding where we have the lowest-income folks, the poorest people in all of Canada. The issues and the points that you raise are certainly important issues — not just for my riding, I suspect for the province as a whole.

The point that I want to ask you about is the information about our rate in comparison to Newfoundland and Labrador. Aside from the rate issue — according to your presentation on page 3, they currently receive 26 percent more in Newfoundland than in British Columbia, for example, for a single employable person — have you also calculated out, or do you have information on their cost of living and how that compares to British Columbia as well? I think that also paints a different picture in terms of the value of the dollar, of what you can purchase in different provinces.

M. Crawford: Right. As you may know, the low-income cutoff is actually calculated on city size and so

forth — urban versus rural — so there are those. But no, I don't have that specific information about other provinces, particularly Newfoundland and Labrador.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Michael, I want to thank you. As I've indicated earlier, 15 minutes is not a great deal of time, but you certainly put your message through with your ideas. I thank you for taking time out of your day to come and present.

Our next presentation this morning is from Anita Strong, who is with the Council of Canadians.

Good morning, Anita.

A. Strong: Good morning. I'm doing this presentation on behalf of myself as well as the Council of Canadians. I'm the chair of the local chapter of the Council of Canadians. I'd like to first thank the committee for taking the time to consult with the public on the matter of the budget and, more specifically, to hear my submission.

I'd like to make my submission more or less specific to the rules, provisions and procedures outlined in the trade, investment and labour mobility agreement between British Columbia and Alberta, which will impact on my livelihood and that of others whose income is realized through either farming or small business. As well, it impacts on the democratic nature of our communities in our province.

Let me begin by stating that I don't believe we need yet another trade deal which will hamstring the ability of local governments to deal with local matters. Furthermore, on the international level, without exception, every time we've signed a free trade deal with another country, our share of exports to that country has declined. I realize that this agreement is not of the same magnitude, yet it should certainly give one pause to consider what the unintended outcomes of such a deal might be.

[0935]

This agreement goes beyond the agreement on internal trade by locking it in as provincial government policy and by expanding the AIT through implementation of a binding dispute mechanism. This would have significant impacts on local governments as their procurement decisions would be subject to extensive litigation.

In addition, the requirement to eliminate any barriers to trade, investment or labour mobility suggests that the agreement is not limited to trade between B.C. and Alberta and could be used to challenge any regulations that restrict or impair trade, investment or labour mobility.

I'd like to refer first to article 4, non-discrimination, part 1. This best-treatment clause, which is also in the AIT, is one of the clauses which impinge heavily on the authority of local governments. Any regional or rural development or local area economic development initiatives by local government immediately establish the right for all persons or corporations from the other party to demand the same level of treatment. Invariably, that government's obligations will be expanded.

Likewise, in part 2 of article 4, governments are precluded from getting any discount rates that might advance any particular public investment objectives,

such as developing an economically depressed area or local neighbourhood revitalization programs. Under these rules, the economy of the Okanagan Valley, for example, would look very different today. The hand up which was given to that area could not have been done without endless litigation.

Article 5, part 3, says that a party shall not establish new standards or regulations that operate to restrict or impair trade, investment or labour mobility. This clause will bring to a standstill all government regulation in the economy in some way restricts or impairs commercial activity. Why would a government want to tie its own hands in this way?

Then, immediately following, part 4 directly contradicts part 3 by saying that parties shall continue to work toward the enhancement of sustainable development, consumer and environmental protection, and health, safety and labour standards. This trade agreement has some self-evident flaws.

The article, though, which I believe most glaringly points out the strong anti-democratic nature of the agreement is the next one, article 6. The list of legitimate objectives that a party may adopt — which are inconsistent with articles 3, 4 or 5 — is extremely short and has some significant omissions. It doesn't, for example, allow for measures that promote economic development in general and development of small business in rural areas in particular. It doesn't promote international justice, such as ethical purchasing policies, and it doesn't allow for protection of a range of human rights, such as the right to form a union. It doesn't allow the requirement to access to services for rural areas or for disadvantaged people.

A broad range of legislation would be in violation of this agreement. For example, the goal of preserving agricultural land that underlies the ALR is not recognized, nor is the possible goal of a future government of making access to technology a legitimate objective. Legitimate objectives of governments in a democracy should be able to change over time, depending on the will of the citizenry. Such democratic capabilities are precluded in this agreement, and authority for what is necessary in key policy areas is transferred from elected representatives to trade dispute panellists.

Furthermore, governments trying to defend their regulations as necessary in similar cases at the World Trade Organization almost invariably lose. Again, why would we willingly want to put ourselves in such a situation?

We encounter the loss of democracy again in article 7, part 2(c). Here the authors of this agreement say that if a party is proposing to adopt or amend a measure which may affect the operation of the agreement, the other party must have the right to comment on and have its comments taken into consideration. This is not the democracy that I grew up with. It used to be that elected representatives of a province were answerable to the citizens of that province and were not answerable to a non-resident person or corporation. Now it seems we're about to open ourselves up to the potential

of endless litigation and the astronomical costs associated with that.

[0940]

Business subsidies are again dealt with in article 12, part 1(c), where parties are forbidden to provide any subsidy which might distort investment decisions. Although in the definition section general taxation is excluded from actionable subsidies, tax breaks are not. Consequently, any tax break given by a municipality to a small business to foster development in an economically depressed neighbourhood would be a violation under the very broad category of a subsidy that distorts investment decisions.

It would seem to me that subsidiaries of large corporations would have a definite advantage by their sheer size and their ability to shift profits to other less profitable branches, and local initiatives would suffer.

Article 14 deals with procurement. The administrative and financial burden placed on local governments and institutions such as school boards is untenable, the thresholds being even lower than those of the AIT, unjustifiably increasing the impact on those governments. For example, goods in the value of only \$10,000 under the agreement could not be purchased locally without fear of being challenged under the dispute process and having costs assigned to the procuring party. Or the panel could require that the bidding process be reopened, and the procuring party would be forced to comply. Again, what we have is undue influence on local decision-making — something which citizens neither want nor need.

Just as an aside, exceptions to government procurement include, along with philanthropic institutions and persons with disabilities, prison labour. I hope this does not mean that prison labour will in the future be a force to be reckoned with.

The area of energy is another where outside influence would work to the detriment of local needs as well as the environment. We're told in article 15(2) that we must promote enhanced interjurisdictional trade in energy, and we know this is not confined to the B.C.-Alberta agreement. Being connected to the western interconnection region means that unnecessary power line construction will take precedence over provincial electricity needs, and that will inevitably lead to the obligation to maintain a given level of supply, as is now the case with our oil and natural gas. We now export 70 percent of our oil to the U.S. and import 55 percent of our own needs, mostly from unstable Middle Eastern states.

Power line and pipeline construction will have very detrimental environmental effects, when the focus is on trade rather than on meeting local energy requirements. Furthermore, the B.C. Utilities Commission ensures that domestic customers receive the benefit of the utilities' low-cost resources for a minimum of ten years, but this term has only three years left. Then the B.C. advantage, as far as electricity goes, will evaporate.

This myriad of areas which are touched by the agreement — of which I've mentioned only a few — will, when the agreement enters into force, become the responsibility of a cabinet minister. He will, in effect, have the responsibility of overseeing many depart-

ments, ensuring implementation and adherence to the provisions which are most threatening, such as necessity-testing of all regulations. It could well become one gigantic bureaucratic tangle.

In conclusion, I would strongly suggest that the government and opposition take a hard second look at this agreement and for the government to refrain from signing it next April. The media should have made much more of such a blatantly antidemocratic proposal. But as they have not, it is up to this government to step back from handing authority and legislation-making over to corporations and dispute-settling mechanisms where never-ending litigation will take its place.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you, Anita, for your presentation. I'll see if there are any questions from members of the committee.

R. Lee: Thank you for the presentation and, of course, the agreement. My understanding is that the agreement is aimed at making Alberta and B.C. just one economic region so workers and professionals can move around without too much restriction, and that will generate an economic benefit for B.C. in the order of \$6 billion — that kind of order. I believe that's a benefit to British Columbians. Of course, there are some concerns, but I think some of the concerns could be studied further to see what the impact is.

Do you agree with the economic impact?

[0945]

A. Strong: I agree that the economic impact will probably be very great, but like international free trade agreements, the benefits accrue to a small minority of people or to a small minority of corporations. The great majority of the benefits are never felt by ordinary people. In fact, it's often to their detriment as jobs are lost and disappear into other jurisdictions.

R. Lee: One of the problems for workers in B.C. sometimes is mobility — not only moving to other provinces to work and other provinces' workers coming to B.C. to work.... For example, engineers. Sometimes it is difficult to facilitate mobility so that their qualifications are recognized in different provinces. So I believe there are benefits to ordinary people.

A. Strong: I understand what the objective of this agreement is, but when you look at all the ways that democracy is being lost through handing over authority to tribunals who adjudicate on these things and to people who dispute decisions made by local and provincial governments, I think this has to be looked at much more carefully before it's signed into effect.

I understand what you're saying — that it's to our benefit to have more trade east and west — but I think it also opens it up to more trade north and south, where it would seem that we invariably lose out.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): I just wanted to be clear about a point you were making. Are you saying that

the B.C.-Alberta agreement will conflict with the B.C. low-cost power electricity for domestic consumers?

A. Strong: No. That guarantee of lower costs for residents is due to expire in three years anyway. I mean, that's the minimum — three years. This benefit to B.C. residents can then be terminated. If this B.C.-Alberta agreement is in effect at that time, then the chances of that lower cost for B.C. residents being continued after that initial ten-year period is highly unlikely, because it would constitute an interference with trade.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): I see. So you're saying that in your view, the B.C.-Alberta agreement does conflict with that.

A. Strong: Yeah.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Anita, again I thank you. Just a couple of quick questions. The issue — and I was going to touch on that as well — is that we don't use market-based pricing in our electricity system. We're very fortunate in that sense. In British Columbia we have some of the lowest rates in North America. I think we're sitting third right now.

Enshrined in legislation, as well, is the heritage power that we develop through W.A.C. Bennett and so on. I've gone through this agreement between B.C. and Alberta, because it has significant impact in the area I represent. I don't see that as an issue. I'm not sure whether we're worried in the sense.... Certainly, you look into the future to see: is there a possibility? I haven't read that into it.

If we were under a market-based pricing system, I think I could see that concern, but we're not.

A. Strong: What I was looking at is the ten-year period which started six or seven years ago. B.C. residents were ensured this non-market-based pricing. That minimum of ten years is going to expire in three years.

Under this agreement — the B.C.-Alberta agreement — the chances of that being extended I don't see as being very great.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): If you're interested, there is legislation on the pricing under the hydro and so on. If you're at all interested, you could contact us following that, and I could get you some information on that. I think it may go some way to explain that side of it.

The concerns you raise are legitimate in the sense that we want to make sure what we enter into is appropriate. But I can tell you that in the area I represent in Peace River South, which is minutes from the Alberta border and huge in the oil and gas side of it, we have a regulatory environment that you have to streamline.

[0950]

We can haul pipe across North America and hit the British Columbia border, and then we're breaking down. For some reason, for whatever has transpired over the years, there hasn't been a melding of regula-

tions. I think there's a lot of that on the trade issue, as well, that comes into this under transportation issues and so on, so I think your caution that you've put forward is certainly noteworthy. But as far as opening it up, I think the whole idea — and it was said by an earlier speaker — is that regardless of what political party you're with, the goal is to make British Columbia a better place.

A. Strong: Certainly. And part of being a better place is being able to govern ourselves without fear of interference from outside.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Very much. I agree.

You've obviously put a great deal of thought and time into this. Thank you for taking the time.

Our next presentation this morning is from the Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society, and joining us are Louise Richards and Kathleen Kendall.

Good morning, and welcome to the committee.

K. Kendall: Good morning. Thank you.

L. Richards: Thank you for this opportunity.

By way of background, the Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society is a registered non-profit charity. It has been serving the area in and around Kamloops for the past 32 years. The society arose out of a need that was identified in the community. We have continued to offer programming that responds to our changing community.

[B. Ralston in the chair.]

I've set out in the submission our entire mission statement. Just briefly, our purpose is to serve people who are in conflict with the law, with an emphasis on the needs of women and youth. We offer a variety of programs that are all connected to justice issues as we see them.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

Currently we operate a residential attendance program, three affordable housing buildings, a legal advocacy program, library and pretrial services at the Kamloops Regional Correctional Centre, a volunteer court work program at the Kamloops courthouse, a housing activity program and a housing resource service as well as a community collaboration project.

We employ 13 regular staff, contract with ten families in the community, and we average about 35 volunteers over the course of a year. That's the way we provide our services. In the past year our records show that we assisted approximately 10,000 people.

Our agency has funding from diverse sources: the United Way, the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General, the Law Foundation of British Columbia, B.C. Housing, the Ministry of Attorney General, city of Kamloops and the Canadian Association of Elizabeth

Fry Societies. We also undertake some fundraising efforts in the community throughout the year. It's from this knowledge base that we're bringing forward our recommendations to you.

The first point we'd like to make, under recommendation one, is that there needs to be greater support for the work of the non-profit sector. The environment in which we and many non-profits operate is challenging in the extreme because of the uncertainty of our funding base. All but two of our programs operate on the basis of annual contracts or grants. This creates an environment in which staff are unsure from year to year if their positions will be continuing.

In addition, the amounts of our contracts have not increased over the past four years and likely longer. Our operations are very lean, and in our submission you'll likely find that most non-profits provide exceptional value for money with respect to service delivery.

The unpredictability of contracts and the lack of increases in the contract amounts cause challenges, one of the most significant being the ability to recruit and retain qualified staff. It's a credit to staff that their level of commitment is such that they've continued to work in the non-profit sector. However, it should not be necessary that they forgo fair compensation and stability in their work placement.

[0955]

Secondly, the society is aware of the need for fiscal accountability and sustainability while delivering programming that is responsive to community needs. In order to ensure that we are meeting these objectives, the board recently developed a strategic plan to guide the society. However, there are certain realities that are outside the society's control that will affect its capacity to accomplish its mission. As with qualified staff, it is increasing difficult to recruit and retain skilled board members from a variety of disciplines.

Fundraising has become one of the prime focuses of many non-profits, and it's not a funded function. A great deal of valuable time can be expended in this direction with little result. The community is facing increasing requests for funding, and donor fatigue has become a reality. Causes that are more appealing to the general public receive a greater response, and those with a less sympathetic aspect struggle.

Our first set of recommendations are that the province move to a system of contracting that would provide for longer-term contracts, which would enable staff to focus more fully on the delivery of programs; that the province recognize the increasing costs of operating and provide appropriate levels of compensation in its contracts with the non-profit sector; and that the province provide funding for programs which the community identifies as being needed to address serious issues that are within the scope of provincial jurisdiction.

My second recommendation relates to services to criminalized women, and the Elizabeth Fry Societies have somewhat of a specialty in this area. The Elizabeth Fry Societies in British Columbia meet with women in the community who have been in prison and, also, visit in the prisons. Recently we attended a

meeting of the British Columbia Elizabeth Fry Societies in the Prince George Regional Correctional Centre. Of the 24 women there, all but one was from an aboriginal, Métis or Inuit background, and this is reflective of the prison population in British Columbia.

The prisons are ill-equipped to deal with the many challenges of reintegrating women into their communities after imprisonment. More often they actually make such pre-existing challenges worse. Poverty as well as the compounding discriminatory factors of racism, class bias and the stigma of being labelled a criminal make it increasingly difficult for women to integrate into the community. Women need additional support both in prison and when they are released. Current training, educational and therapeutic programs do not meet their needs.

Although it is clear the programs are not comparable in quantity, quality or variety to those provided to sentenced men, it is not useful to make simple comparisons between programs for men and programs for women. Instead, the particular needs and interests of women prisoners must be examined to ensure substantial equality and allow women prisoners to progress toward a successful reintegration into society.

Programs that should prepare women for meaningful work are virtually nonexistent. Where promising programs do exist, enrolment is very limited or the equipment and training skills taught are outdated.

For women with disabilities, there are even fewer training programs geared to their needs. Access to therapeutic counselling is very limited, especially for those with the greatest need, most of whom spend much of their time in virtual isolation and segregation.

Despite the fact that the majority of women in prison are aboriginal, there is limited, if any, access to programs and services that meet their cultural needs.

Provincially sentenced women have the right to ready access to programs and services designed by, with and for them. Such programs must also be supported and delivered by women, staff and volunteers who have adequate training and understanding to deliver them.

The second step is to ensure that women in prison have the necessary support when they return to their communities. Many women in prison are functionally illiterate and lack the basic life skills to participate in their communities. To be successfully rehabilitated and returned and integrated into their communities, aboriginal women must have access to programs that are created and facilitated by people from their cultural communities.

Our next set of recommendations.

That the province provides sufficient funding for each woman so that appropriate resources are available for her when she returns to her community.

[1000]

We also recommend that the province enhance its spending on community-based criminal sanctions, including such options as probation, suspended sentences, attendance centres, educational and vocational programming or training, therapeutic and self-help services, neighbourhood and community service, restitution, compensation, mediation, as well as the variety

of alternative forms of residentially-based treatment and community supervision options — from halfway or quarterway houses to supported independent living and satellite housing projects.

We recommend that the province introduce a public awareness program that would encourage MLAs, judges and the public to gain access and exposure to women's prisons with a view to providing an opportunity for women in prisons to engage in public education to dispel myths with respect to the realities of the role, conditions and impact of prisoners and prisons.

Our third recommendation relates to safe, affordable housing. Despite the upturn in the economy, we are finding an increasing number of people coming to us for assistance with issues relating to basic needs — the ability to feed, clothe and shelter themselves and their children. We have requests for help from people aged 15 to 70.

Housing is only one of a list of challenges these people are facing, but until they have a place to live, they cannot address any of their other problems. In order to get food from the food bank, they need an address. In order to qualify for welfare, they need an address. To look for work, they have to have a place to live so that they can be clean and presentable and have a place for potential employers to contact them. They even require an address to obtain a library card.

[B. Ralston in the chair.]

Parents looking for housing for themselves and their children need a safe, clean place to live so that the children can attend school and be able to learn once they are there. Without a safe and decent place to live, parents are facing having their children taken away from them. Conversely, women talk about surrendering their children to the ministry so that the children can have access to adequate food, housing and clothing.

We receive an average of 25 applications per month for our housing, and on average, we have two suites available per month.

We recommend that the province increase the resources that it directs toward affordable housing alternatives, be it via the construction or renovation of suites and townhouses, emergency and transitional housing, or rent supplements and prepaid leases.

Secondly, we recommend that the province provide funding for appropriate support services within the affordable housing to assist people to develop the necessary education and life skills to become participating members of the community.

K. Kendall: Our next set of recommendations relate to access to justice for women in family court proceedings. I'm here as a board member of the Elizabeth Fry Society, but you should also know that I'm also the staff lawyer for the legal services office in Kamloops. I'm not here to try and sneak anything in through Elizabeth Fry, but I've been with Legal Services for 21 years, so I have extensive knowledge of how it operates and what we do.

Women are getting beat up in family court since the cutbacks to legal aid. They're going in, more and more, as self-represented litigants. If they are not coming out of an abusive relationship, they're rarely entitled to counsel. You can talk to the Provincial Court judges about it. The system is a mess. Women are losing custody of their children on purely financial grounds. If they have an ex-spouse who is financially solvent, they get dragged into Supreme Court where they don't have a hope in hell of representing themselves successfully.

They're losing property and spousal rights that would alleviate the number of women and children living in poverty because they are not represented by counsel. They're trying to do it on their own, and they simply can't.

It's a false economy, because we have women and children living in poverty who should be entitled to live in safe, affordable housing and be adequately clothed and fed.

Closing of courthouses and legal aid offices means that rural women are being really marginalized. If they're in an abusive relationship, the quick and easy remedy is Provincial Court. They don't have one to go to.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Just if I might, each person is allotted about 15 minutes. I understand these are important issues, but you are coming close to the time. Perhaps you could focus on your recommendations, because we do have the written presentation, which we will give consideration to.

[1005]

K. Kendall: Yeah. I'm not reading my written presentation in the awareness of that.

Our first recommendation with respect to access to justice is that the province adequately fund legal aid to truly ensure access to justice to women in family law disputes and that the province adequately fund mediation services so that all issues in dispute can be dealt with and women can access publicly funded mediation services without fear of economic oppression.

As I'm sure you're aware, family justice centres can't deal with property issues, so women who aren't entitled to counsel cannot go to the family justice centre to have their property issues dealt with.

Recommendation 5: appropriate supports for women living in poverty. We're very strongly opposed to the cutbacks that were made to welfare rates. It's a fallacy to believe that if you make it very difficult for people to live on welfare, they'll go out and find a job. Women on welfare are having problems finding jobs because of cutbacks to child care supports, training and higher education, and they are being forced to stay in abusive relationships, engage in survival sex and/or criminal activity. They're being forced to stay in exploitive or unsafe jobs because if they quit their job, they're not entitled to welfare.

I have clients who have had their children removed. One of the reasons is the ministry has concerns about their shelter. What's the first thing that happens? Their welfare gets cut so that they cannot afford to live in accommodation that their children can be returned

to. The Ministry of Children and Families needs to be appropriately funded so that they can provide programs for families to reunite when the children have been removed.

Our recommendations under this heading: the province immediately increase income assistance rates to allow families to provide adequate food, clothing and shelter and reduce risk to children growing up in poverty; the province reinstate the income and child support exemptions to income assistance so that single parents can keep some income and child support to provide adequately for their children; and the province adequately fund the Ministry of Children and Families to provide programs to families at risk of, or subject to, removal proceedings.

I have clients that can only see their kids two hours a week because their access has to be supervised. How do you reunite a family under those circumstances?

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Thanks very much. The 15 minutes allotted has expired. Thank you for raising these important issues with us. We do have the full written brief, but I'll have to forego questions here to make sure that we get through our agenda.

The next group is the AIDS Society of Kamloops, Jo Rothenburger.

J. Rothenburger: Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you. There is such a full range of issues that I know you are being presented with from many different societies. I'm going to focus on a very limited, small portion of our community, but let me just put it in a bit of context first.

The AIDS Society of Kamloops is a society that became multifaceted, serving a broad range of people. However, its origins were obviously as an AIDS service delivery organization. Currently, like other agencies, we are funded by several different ministries. We have dollars that come from Interior Health. We have the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance; city of Kamloops; gaming; United Way; B.C. Housing; and, most importantly, the community, through activities like our Walk for Life.

What I'm here to speak to you about, though.... I have three recommendations which I will lay out, and then I'm going to tell you a couple of personal stories that relate to them.

My first recommendation is that there be a mandated body to address systemic barriers to services; second, that there be resources directed to the city of Kamloops so that the city itself can address issues that are unique to its own community; and third, that we need to challenge our current human rights thinking and our beliefs around human choice.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

There is a wonderful document here that is called "Homelessness in British Columbia." It is feedback from regional homeless forums with local governments and provincial partners, September 2006. This is your

own document so I don't need to give it to you. In it is a very thorough look at the issues related to homelessness and the problems that are so clear to all of us that I don't need to repeat them. They are things like the silos of funding, the lack of coordination, our inability to address addiction issues. I'm not going to go on about that. Homelessness is a huge issue. We ourselves, through B.C. Housing, are working to house people every day and doing it very successfully.

[1010]

What I want to talk about is that percentage — it's small, and I'm not even going to put a number on it; it could be 1 to 5 percent — of our community that is homeless. It's our community in Kamloops, it's your community in Vancouver, and it's a community that belongs in Prince George and Kelowna and Victoria. Sometimes it's transient and sometimes it's homegrown and stays here.

These are the people in our community who are incapable of taking care of themselves. They do not have the coping skills for whatever reason. Most often it's related to brain injury — of the frontal lobe, in particular. That brain injury could be a result of physical abuse, FASD — fetal alcohol syndrome. It could be crack cocaine. Whatever has caused it, it is there now. It is sometimes irreparable.

These are the most victimized people in our community. We have no way of getting them off the street. We can get many people off the streets through our housing programs and our outreach work, but there are those individuals who, because of our human rights views.... Don't get the impression I think we should be dragging people around and pushing them into institutions. However, there is a huge issue with people who are not able to be put under adult guardianship because they're choosing to drink or choosing to use.

I'll tell you a story about a man in our community who is probably going to die this year. He has nine brain injuries. He was, as an adult, an FASD, so that was probably the beginning of it. He is a victim by his lack of ability to cope. We in our agency have gone to every extreme to try and assist this person, but you cannot help a person who is incapable of making decisions.

When my mother was near the end of her life, we began to make decisions for her. It was easy to make that happen because she was a respectable, kind person, and we were a respectable, middle-class family. Nobody thought we were in any way trying to impinge on her human rights. But there are people out there who don't have those kinds of people around them. They are left to be victims, and they feed the drug dealers. So we are complacent and all part of this. Because we are not able or don't have the will to make that step and take these people and put them in institutions — and I'll use the word institutions — where they can be cared for, we are failing as a society.

Now you've heard.... I don't have to tell you about the million-dollar man, but I can tell you that in my own community we've had an individual who when you add up the dollars that we spend on hospitals, RCMP, our services, every other service in this com-

munity.... Housing these people is like housing the richest people in our community. If I could give them that \$200,000 a year, boy, I could provide them a pretty good living place and some pretty good care. It's not that we're not spending the money. We're just not spending it efficiently.

Now, I know it pushes the envelope to say that we have to look at these human rights, but I know many of you are familiar with the east end of Vancouver. I want you to know that some of our people are there, and they come back here and then they go back there. We don't own this as a community; we own it as a province.

Another story — just because I really want to highlight to you how incapable some of these individuals are of making decisions. I think nine brain injuries is enough, but we have a 19-year-old girl. A young woman or man becomes 19, is FASD and has been in the care of the ministry up until that point. Suddenly out of the care of the ministry. This woman is on the street in our community for three months in the same clothes prostituting herself to get drugs. Pouring rain. Starving. We can't help her, because she is more driven by the choice to make the drugs. She's not mentally capable of making a decision otherwise.

We have no power to step in and take her off the street. The only thing we can do is call the police, and that starts the revolving door of very expensive services. So this young lady at 19 is going to be exactly where our other client is at 35.

[1015]

My recommendations are that we need to have a mandated body to address the systemic barriers for these people. We need to have resources directly going to the cities that are trying to work with this population, and we need to challenge our beliefs around human rights.

The SPCA in this community would not allow me to have my dog living on our most beautiful beaches defecating and throwing things like garbage around. I would be fined, and my dog would be put in the SPCA or the city pound. I am not equating these human beings to dogs, but I'm saying that we're not giving them the respect that we are giving dogs.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Jo, thank you very much. You're very passionate about the work you do, and it comes across. If I could — just a quick one. The young lady you talked about, the story you related — she's 19 and on the street. The idea you have, that in order to help someone like that.... Certainly, if there are mental issues and so on, it's difficult for them to come forward and say, "I want the help. I need the help," so....

J. Rothenburger: Incapable.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Would it be almost like an imposed incarceration — I mean, the ability to take them off the street? Certainly, that is a social issue and one we have to have a discussion on, but what's your vision of how we would approach that individual to take them from the street to a centre or rehab?

J. Rothenburger: Well, right now the only way you can take them off the street is if they are posing a threat to themselves or to others. I would say that she is imposing a threat to herself. The problem is — and this is why it's not happening — that you open that up and now you've got at least 3,000 people in Vancouver and probably 25 here in Kamloops, and you have nowhere to take them.

We don't have an infrastructure around providing care for these people. Not only do we not have the human understanding that they're not capable of making decisions, even if we could legally pick them up, we have nowhere to take them.

J. Horgan: Thank you, Jo, very much for your passionate presentation.

In 2001 the office of the Mental Health Advocate disappeared. I'm wondering if you would have any thoughts on whether an advocacy position such as that might be useful to deal with the mental illness and brain issue injuries that you talked about and to provide a focal point for the discussion, as you said in your final recommendation.

J. Rothenburger: That would make sense to me, yes. I'll tell you the process I went through with this man with the nine brain injuries. I went through the adult guardianship issue with him, and I was blocked from that because he was choosing to drink. He is an avowed alcoholic. What kind of a choice is he making? If he hadn't been an alcoholic, he would have been put under adult guardianship so quickly your eyes would flash because of the brain injuries that he has. So we have a double standard that's going on.

R. Lee: Some hospitals have a mental health unit. For example, Burnaby Hospital recently had some of these new facilities. There's always a debate on putting patients with brain damage in these institutions. There's an argument on: should we use these institutions to house them? What was your view on this? The debate has been going on for a long time.

J. Rothenburger: That's exactly the debate that I am saying has to be had and has to be revisited. We have to look at: has the pendulum gone too far from deinstitutionalization? My aunt-in-law worked at Essondale for 35 years. She was a caring, concerned person who took care of individuals for many, many years. Some of those people are now on our streets. I can't believe they weren't better off in care, and conversely, our society.... It is not healthy for us to have people who are not capable of caring for themselves randomly running around in our communities causing chaos.

[1020]

It's a two-sided coin, and you know, I'm known in this community as a pretty caring, compassionate.... I don't think I have a reputation as an irrational, off-the-wall person, but when it comes to these individuals, I'm getting very, very off-the-wall, because we have to look at it differently.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Jo, I want to thank you for taking time to come and present. You've raised some issues that I think society as a whole has to talk about and get their minds around and start at least thinking about alternatives.

J. Rothenburger: They're not easy.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Our next presentation this morning is from the Kamloops Women's Resource Centre, and joining us are Dawn Hatch, Trish Archibald, Jasmin Wright and Heather Robinson.

Good morning. Welcome to our committee.

T. Archibald: Good morning. I'm Trish Archibald, with the Kamloops Women's Resource Centre.

It is with great sadness and sorrow today that we are announcing the closure of our Kamloops Women's Resource Centre. On March 31, 2004, the B.C. government cut 100 percent of the only core funding available to the women's centres in B.C. This amounted to only \$47,174 per year to each centre, but even such a small amount enabled women's centres to provide a wide range of services tailored to the specific needs of individual communities.

It was the only source of core funding that women's centres had access to, and it was the only funding available to cover the basic costs associated with operating an organization and maintaining a facility. If an organization cannot afford basic costs such as rent, electricity and a phone line, an organization not only loses the base from which it can provide services, it also loses the necessary foundation it needs in order to levy project dollars.

The women's resource centre has existed in Kamloops since 1979. Over the 27 years the centre has moved at least five times. Previously the decisions to move the centre stemmed from the increased growth in providing programs and services to women and their families. However, our final move is directly related to financial cutbacks by the B.C. government. Without core funding, we are now forced into the position of having to close the Kamloops Women's Resource Centre to the public and dispose of our resource library and most of our assets.

Local grass-roots feminists founded the majority of community women's centres in the 1970s. Funding for centres has changed many times over the years. Most centres previously received a combination of federal and provincial funding for a range of programs, projects and services.

In the beginning centres were typically situated in houses in residential neighbourhoods. Over the years that has become a challenge for women in many communities, and now women's centres are more often than not located in office-type environments. A small number of centres do not pay rent, as their city or municipality provides space to them for free or at substantially discounted rates.

These women's centres operate as non-profit organizations. About half of these have charitable tax

status. Volunteer board members or collectives govern the activities, staff and direction of centres. Membership ranges from about 20 up to hundreds of members, depending on the size of the community. Coordinators, administrators, project coordinators, practicum students, volunteers and researchers have traditionally carried out the work of women's centres.

Women's centres generally have two main focuses that all of the work of the centre relates to: improving the status of women through political, social, economic and legal actions on a local, provincial, national and global scale; and providing direct services to women in the community, determined by local needs.

Over the past few years a large majority of the centres have had to decrease their staff and the hours they're open to the public. Two other women's centres, Fort Nelson and Kitimat, have already been forced to close, while others are being forced to change their purpose and mandate as organizations in order to secure the few service dollars that have been available. Many women's centres are in the same financial position that we are in and are very near to being forced to shut their doors to their communities.

Women's centres in rural and remote communities have the biggest struggles. Women's centres in these rural communities have been everything to everyone. The lack of access to technology in some of these centres further compounds the problems.

[1025]

Many women's centres are now finding their work redirected, in large part due to other cuts in women's services in the province. Women's centres are struggling to keep up not only with increased demand but also with rapidly changing needs. Changes to income assistance regulations, legal aid services, disability benefits and child care, to name a few examples, are also adding a huge amount to workloads at centres.

I'm going to turn it over to Heather now.

H. Robinson: Prior to the cut to core funding, the Kamloops Women's Resource Centre, or KWRC, provided direct service to nearly 3,000 women and girls per year. Women most often bring issues of experiencing violence, poverty, homelessness and discrimination through our doors. Services we provided included information and referral, one-to-one support, crisis intervention, group support, advocacy and many others.

When women turn to the KWRC for help and support, they often say one of two things, "You're my last hope, and no one else will help me," or: "I don't know where to go with my problems. You're the first place I've turned to."

Women bring increasingly complex and unique issues to the Kamloops Women's Resource Centre. Their situations have required us to provide a range of services specifically tailored to the needs of each individual woman accessing the KWRC. It's not for lack of demand for services that the KWRC is in a position of closure. Without stable, secure funding, the Kamloops Women's Resource Centre has found it more and more

difficult to provide these essential women-centred services to the community.

We have reduced staff from two and a half full-time employees to one part-time employee, and we've reduced our public hours from four full-time days to two half days. The bulk of the work is now being done via the unpaid labour of women. In the past we have also done a great deal of work in the community as well as providing intervention services. Some of our greatest work has been in the area of prevention and community-building.

We have been involved in providing pre-employment training; engaged in community development work and partnership-building; participated in a number of advisory bodies in order to advocate for increased inclusivity; provided increased awareness and education to the community on issues of violence, poverty, discrimination and other issues facing women and other marginalized groups; and provided practicum placements and other workplace training to students from a wide variety of education programs — administrative and business programs, social work, counselling psychology and nursing.

These are a few of things we were previously able to do for our community and which we now find ourselves unable to provide due to the increasingly bleak financial situation. While any organization is proud of the volunteers who choose to labour on its behalf, when services are provided to individuals and families, those who provide those services must be accountable to those individuals and families, to the organizations they represent and to the communities they serve. Depending on an unwaged, untrained volunteer labour force places a huge risk on service users. Additionally, liability and confidentiality issues prevent volunteers from engaging in the administration work that is essential to maintaining an organization.

There are other ethical issues related to the increasing expectation that the unpaid labour of women will fill the many huge gaps created by services cuts. Not only does this expectation reduce the number of paid jobs in a community, it places an increasingly heavier burden on women, who do the majority of all volunteer labour in any community, especially in the area of health and social services.

This expectation is a throwback to a time when women often didn't work outside the home and had extra time to give to communities. Now, however, many women must work outside the home in order to support their families and to pay for things like post-secondary education for their children. Most women juggle paid labour and unpaid labour as caregivers to children, elders and other family members.

The expectation that women should increase their provision of free labour to communities is exploitive and not the mark of a just society. In 2002, after the announcement that our provincial core funding would be cut in 2004, each women's centre was given a cheque for the sum of \$3,000 and told to use it to seek alternative sources of funding. Women's centres have spent the past four years and much effort seeking these alternative sources of funding. The reality is that there are no alternative sources of core funding available to

women's centres. The provincial government is the only level of government that has the mechanisms to provide operating funding to women's centres across B.C.

[1030]

T. Archibald: We're going to have Dawn now.

D. Hatch: Good morning. Thank you for this opportunity.

I'd like to speak to why advocacy groups are vital to British Columbia. Advocacy is the act of empowering individuals to find their voice or to speak up on behalf of those who can't speak. Advocacy is also about addressing power imbalances between many citizens and their relationship with government.

An equal importance must be given to advocacy's role in bringing attention to the deep-rooted problems facing society, such as those issues brought forth by the civil rights movement, the environmental movement and the women's movement. Things we now take for granted, such as sidewalk ramps for the disabled or shelters for abused women, are the result of long, hard advocacy work by committed individuals and organizations.

A healthy, democratic society can't function properly without advocates working on behalf of individuals and towards systemic change. Policy decisions can be made without recognition of their impact on these people who are without a voice — the disadvantaged and marginalized people.

Without advocates speaking up, governments rarely hear about the impact their policies have on people's very lives. Whether or not governments welcome the voices of dissent, governments in a fair and democratic society need to hear them. Unfortunately, in B.C. cutbacks as well as policy and legislative changes have created an environment of censorship, where both individuals and organizations have become afraid to speak out lest they face consequences via job loss or loss of funding opportunities respectively.

Governments must remember that they have a responsibility to all people in British Columbia and not just those with the highest incomes and easy access to the political table.

A healthy government will be concerned that its decisions are implemented in the way that they are meant to be. If a government is being honest and forthright, it will have its legislation, policies and services evaluated by the various user groups on an ongoing basis.

One of the most fundamental principles of democratic governance is a willingness to accept criticism alongside approval. Governments are put in place to serve their citizens and must do everything they can to make sure everyone has equal access, equal voice and equal participation.

Governments must remain cognizant of the difficulty public interest advocates face when searching for funding. Those who need advocacy organizations are usually not able to fund them. If the disenfranchised citizens of our province had access to those financial resources, they would not be disenfranchised.

Additionally, many advocacy groups do not have access to charitable tax status. Their inability to give tax receipts often discourages individuals and businesses from donating to these organizations.

A government that behaves ethically, responsibly and with integrity will not fear being held up for criticism and accountability to its citizens and will have no fear of funding advocacy organizations. Rather, a good government welcomes the opportunity to increase the fairness and justice available to its citizens and will provide the resources necessary to ensure that a fair and just society flourishes.

T. Archibald: And last, we have Jasmin.

J. Wright: I'll be talking about the experiences of women in British Columbia. As you can see behind me, some women have joined us. They're part of the women who share these experiences.

Women in British Columbia have lost much ground in recent years. These are just some of the major cuts, which have had a huge impact in lessening women's equality rights in B.C.

The Ministry of Women's Equality was dissolved and replaced with a junior ministerial position within a larger ministry responsible for services. While initially dedicated to women's equality, this junior minister is responsible for women's and seniors' services. Equality has been abandoned completely.

The provincial Mental Health Advocate, the Ministers Advisory Council on Women's Health and the B.C. Human Rights Commission have all been abolished.

In addition to the loss of core funding for women's centres, legal aid for family poverty and immigration law have also been cut, while community law offices all over the province have been closed. The eradication of poverty law funding also ended nearly all advocacy for people who are denied access to social benefits provided by governments, such as disability benefits, public pensions and income assistance when needed.

[1035]

Employment standards offices around the province were closed, and the director of employment standards is no longer required to investigate complaints. Workers must now navigate the process alone with the aid of English-only self-help kits. The equity and diversity branch was eliminated, and the pay equity provision in the Human Rights Code repealed.

British Columbia's international obligations. As a Canadian province, British Columbia is mandated to uphold the same international laws that our nation has agreed to uphold. Canada and individual provinces, including British Columbia, are required to report periodically to the United Nations regarding what measures have been taken to ensure compliance with international human rights treaties, such as the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

After hearing the testimony of B.C. women's groups in January 2003, the UN committee reported back that it was concerned about changes in British

Columbia that have disproportionately negative impacts on women, in particular aboriginal women.

The UN committee listed a number of cutbacks that were of particular concern, including the cut in funds for legal aid and welfare assistance, including changes in eligibility rules; the cut in welfare assistance; the incorporation of the Ministry of Women's Equality under the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services; the abolition of the independent Human Rights Commission; the closing of a number of courthouses; and the proposed changes regarding the prosecution of domestic violence as well as the cut in support programs for victims of domestic violence.

The committee went on further to urge the government of British Columbia to analyze its recent legal measures as to their negative impact on women and to amend the measures where necessary.

This brings us to our recommendations. Today we are before you to ask you to provide emergency funding to those women's centres which are in financial crisis — including the Kamloops Women's Resource Centre — and to restore and enhance funding to women's centres across British Columbia.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much for a well-thought-out and well-presented position to our committee here today. I know that there probably would be a number of questions, although we have used up all of the time. We're over. So with reference to the people who come behind you, if members have anything that they would like to ask, I'm going to ask if they could do it later or just get in contact with the group.

Thank you for taking the time. The job was well done.

Our next presentation this morning is from Tenisci Piva Chartered Accountants, and joining us is Ron Tenisci.

Good morning. Welcome to the committee.

R. Tenisci: Thank you. I see familiar faces here, because this is the second time I've been in front of your committee. It was just probably six months ago. It's nice to see that we get to see our government in action. It must be a rigorous schedule for you people going around the province. It's also good to see that there are member representatives from both parties here. I think that's great.

My name is Ron Tenisci. You're getting pretty close to pronouncing it right.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I was going to say, twice and both times wrong.

R. Tenisci: That's pretty close. I'm a chartered accountant with the local firm called Tenisci Piva. We deal primarily with small business clients.

Before getting into my recommendations for the 2007 budget, I'd like to point out to the committee — I probably don't have to point it out, because you know — that the investment climate in the province has improved considerably in recent years. The economic growth that we normally see taking place in, say, the lower mainland, the northeast and the capital region of

the province is now also taking place in other parts of the province, including Kamloops.

[1040]

There are some encouraging signs here. Our population growth is fairly close to the provincial average now, after lagging behind for the past five years. I believe the provincial average right now.... The growth was 1.3 percent last year, and ours was 1 percent, so we're pretty well there. The number of residential building permits is up 121 percent here compared to five years ago. Non-residential building permits are up by 78 percent.

We see optimism in the form of business incorporations as well. In Kamloops, incorporations are up by 60 percent compared to five years ago, and business bankruptcies are down by 44 percent.

There's no doubt our economy is doing well. I would credit this to a variety of factors, including high commodity prices but also the improved policy and regulatory environment that we have. The challenge for any government is to create the right conditions and incentives in order to sustain this economic growth over time — this economic growth that we're currently experiencing.

As a resource-dependent province, we're very vulnerable to the cyclical nature of commodity prices. The risks involved to our long-term economic health were mentioned by the Finance Minister in her recent quarterly report. So my recommendations to the committee are to take advantage of the policy levers in our control to encourage long-term growth and to help us withstand the next commodity price drop, whenever that may occur.

One key area that can help our entire economy is productivity. At least since the 1990s B.C. has lagged behind the nation when it comes to our level of productivity. I was recently reading a B.C. Progress Board report from earlier this year, and it found that we ranked sixth in productivity in the country in the year 2004.

There was a similar finding to this in the *B.C. Check-Up* report by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in their last B.C. checkup. So the conclusion is that boosting productivity in all sectors of the economy would help improve the province's overall economic performance.

How do we increase this productivity? I think it's best achieved through regulatory reform, including harmonization of regulatory standards, taxation policy, public infrastructure, education, skills training and research. Therefore, I think the government should move to harmonize legislation and regulations with other provinces wherever it can be done.

The recent Alberta-B.C. trade, investment and labour mobility agreement is an excellent example of an initiative that can have positive implications for productivity. As an agreement meant to harmonize the regulatory environment between the two provinces, that can only help our industries to be more efficient and more productive.

I know that the Institute of Chartered Accountants has expressed its desire to harmonize the sales tax. While we can't get into the details here, I'd simply add that such an initiative would have positive implications for productivity. By simplifying its desire to harmonize

the sales tax.... This would result in simplifying administration required by businesses throughout the province. It would also save businesses' valuable time and resources that could be better directed elsewhere.

It's not efficient to have two levels of government apply different sales taxes with a different set of rules. With no provincial sales tax, Alberta does not have that problem. They're just fortunate that they don't need that sales tax. We don't have that luxury, but at least the harmonization would help.

When it comes to general taxation policy, we've done very well in recent years. We've essentially moved from a high-tax jurisdiction. At one time we were pretty well the highest-taxed jurisdiction in Canada. Now we're one of the lowest. Alberta, with its debt-free status, is very aggressive. However, this could pose challenges for us down the road. We at least need to be competitive with Alberta's tax rates to ensure that we can continue to attract and retain both the workers and investment.

[1045]

We also need to invest in infrastructure. The government has initiated numerous infrastructure projects throughout the province, which is essential for trade capacity. I strongly encourage the government to continue its commitment to building infrastructure around the province.

I would add that B.C., like other provinces in Canada, is facing a serious demographic challenge. We'll need a great deal of skilled labour in the years ahead. Labour shortages are going to be a serious challenge for our province. We are experiencing that throughout Kamloops as well. It's very difficult for any type of a business to find appropriate labour at this juncture.

I realize that we've initiated new skills training programs, and we're opening up, apparently, 25,000 new post-secondary spaces. I simply encourage the government to continue putting post-secondary education at or near the top of their priority list in the years ahead.

Finally, to encourage productivity growth, we need more research and development. While the government has initiated some tax incentives for the high-tech industry, I believe that tax incentives for research and development are positive instruments for encouraging innovation in the province.

I'd like to thank you for allowing me to make my submissions here. If there are questions, I'd like to entertain them now.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much, Ron, for coming and taking time out of your schedule to present to our committee. I'll look to members of the committee if they have any questions of your presentation here this morning.

J. Horgan: We've heard from a number of individuals — accountants mostly — about the harmonization of the two sales taxes question. What are your views on the imbalance of those products that are taxed at the federal level and not taxed at the provincial level that are, over the course of the development of the PST, deliberately exempted so that families, quite

often, can save those tax dollars? Is there any notion that you might have about how we could do this harmonization while not increasing the number of items taxed at the provincial level?

R. Tenisci: Well, I don't have specific ideas on it, but I'd like to encourage just taking, mainly, the administrative part of it away so that we're not dealing with paying 6 percent here and 7 percent there. It's just one combined tax. Basically, it wouldn't be meant to affect the individuals — more the business community that has to administer those taxes.

J. Horgan: Hon. Chair, I know that we've only one question, but this was a shorter presentation.

My spouse is a small business person, and she's grappling with the administrative component that you're talking about. In a desire to reduce that administration cost, more in time than anything else, there could be an increased burden on families. That's certainly something that I'm mindful of when I see her pulling her hair out with the various forms. I remind her that the PST does have a reduced number of items, and....

R. Tenisci: Oh, I see — compared to the....

J. Horgan: From a consumer perspective, a tax is a tax is a tax. But I agree. From a business perspective, the additional paperwork is odious at best.

R. Lee: On research and development — you put forward that that should be one of the priorities, besides tax incentives by government and, also, other grants or whatever.

Businesses and corporations. What do you think? Should they play a more important part in investment in research and development? And what kind of research and development do you think should be developed in B.C.?

R. Tenisci: Well, research and development mainly in the tech industries and research and development in the natural resources, where we can come up with better ways of taking out minerals, etc. I think that the more research and development we do provides us with more economic ways of producing our goods and services, so it makes it less costly for the small business, putting out more profits and eventually paying more taxes on those profits.

[1050]

I. Black: My question is one on the debt. You kind of skirted around a couple of the big-picture economic issues we're facing. When it comes to priorities as to what to do with our resources as a province, we are facing what has been termed an infrastructure deficit, because there was next to no building done in transportation or schools or anything else for, like, 15 years in this province. So now we've got \$100 billion worth of projects in the pipeline in this area, and you have two choices, like at any other time: you can fund those pro-

jects using debt, or you can fund them by raising taxes or using surpluses, etc.

Can you give us a sense of where the debt sits in the priority scheme and the paying down of that debt relative to some of the other comments that you've made this morning?

R. Tenisci: Well, I think we talked about that subject a few months back — about paying down the debt. I think it has to be a priority to pay down the debt. I believe we talked in terms of having a 10-percent factor based on GDP.

I have no problem with having to fund these new projects with debt — I mean, if that's what it takes. We only have a certain amount of resources. These infrastructures have to be put in place, and you have to get them in place in any way you can, whether it's increased.... I don't want to see increased taxes. I'd rather see the borrowing. Reduction in taxes will stimulate the economy and, at the end of the day, produce more taxes.

I have no problem with going after the debt, using the debt to fund these infrastructures, because it's a significant purchase that you people are faced with — a significant project.

I. Black: You bet.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Ron, I want to thank you again for taking the time out of your schedule to come and present your ideas based on priorities and the vision for British Columbia.

Our next presentation this morning is brought to us by Jane Birkbeck, Natalie Lidster and Lauren McCusker. Hopefully, I did those names justice. It just might not be my morning when it comes to names.

Good morning, and welcome to the committee.

J. Birkbeck: Good morning. Thank you kindly. My name is Jane Birkbeck, and with me here to present today are two students from Thompson Rivers University, Lauren McCusker and Natalie Lidster.

I sit on the board of the Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre. I volunteer with a number of advocacy groups in Kamloops. These groups all work for women and children who live in poverty and who experience different instances of violence in their lives. I'm a long-time volunteer of Kamloops Women's Resource Centre, and I mourn its closing.

We're seeing more advocacy groups every day. This is a headline from *Kamloops This Week*, last Friday: "Docs Urge Grits to Ante up for Poor." Our MLA, the Hon. Claude Richmond, says this is just one more advocacy group. You know, these numbers of advocacy groups are increasing as the need for government intervention increases.

Also quoted in this article, which I'll leave with you, is Tim LaRose from the New Life Mission. He says: "Oh yeah, we have to raise the rates because shelter allowances only pay for 60 percent of the rent, and so people are using their food supplement to pay for

their rent." This is a long-time question that women have asked themselves: "Shall I pay the rent or feed the kids?" These kids are at a developmental stage where they need to eat.

When the Liberal government came to power, the poor were targeted as a cause of B.C.'s economic woes. You had to lower taxes and increase the business climate, and we were going to do that by targeting the poor. The current government slashed benefits, increased eligibility rules, and we see these results across the province. I want to talk to you about those just for a couple of minutes. I've lost my watch, so you have to tell me when my time's up.

Women with limited education and no job prospects still have to feed their children. To do this, some women work in the sex trade. On the streets of this city we see women on a daily basis who live at enormous risk of sexual and physical assault, ongoing abuse and murder. They receive the least amount of societal support, because there's a stigma surrounding prostitution.

[1055]

The stigma ignores the fact that almost all young women who end up in the sex trade are fleeing abusive homes. Those with children come to the attention of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, but they don't come to the attention of services for subsidized housing projects or well-funded intervention programs.

Aboriginal women experience twice the unemployment rate of non-aboriginal women. Urban aboriginal families have been particularly susceptible to state intervention in child welfare, but the state isn't willing to intervene when they need housing or other social services. This government's own figures reveal that while only 8 percent of all children in B.C. are aboriginal, now fully 49 percent of children in care are aboriginal. The state isn't an ally. Lone-parent women are one of the most impoverished groups in Canada.

Before this government came to power, the BC Benefits (Income Assistance) Act provided some relief to these women, including those fleeing violence. It met their basic needs for food, shelter and clothing. If they chose to leave a violent relationship, they had some hope that there would be help for them. Today the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance seems to create conditions of poverty and homelessness in B.C. — most appallingly, for young women with young children. This is a fundamental shift in the provision of service, and it's a disturbing one because a civilized society is marked by how we take care of our most marginalized citizens.

An enormous barrier to income assistance for these women who are homeless or temporarily living with a stranger or a reluctant relative or a reluctant friend is that they have to conduct a three-week job search. This three-week job search exists whether the woman is hungry, homeless, ill, inadequately clothed, without bus fare, illiterate. The list is endless.

Then the workers of the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance can look at that work search and decide: is it adequate? And if it's not adequate,

they send these women back out — now into six weeks with no funding — to do another three-week search.

Women and children are unable to access adequate, safe, affordable housing. Without affordable housing, women may camp on the river, live under the bridge or live in their cars. I heard of another family living in their car yesterday from a woman from the infant development program who came to my class and talked. She's meeting with this family in the park.

They may sleep on a stranger's couch and risk all kinds of assault. They may work the streets and increase their addictive behaviours, lose their children to MCFD, be sexually and physically assaulted, or return to an abusive relationship because they have no home. They may become chronically ill, commit suicide.... I just have all these lists.

Here's the thing. Women and children need two things right away — two things that this Liberal government can provide: (1) higher shelter rates under the Employment and Assistance Act, (2) an immediate commitment to work with the federal government to get subsidized housing back not just into this province but into all of Canada. You're well aware that it's over a decade since we've had a subsidized housing program.

I leave you with this thought, and I'll leave you with this little paper. The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives just released an Ipsos-Reid poll that finds 74 percent of British Columbians are in favour of increasing B.C.'s welfare rates. This has got to be useful information when you go back to Victoria. I'd love to answer questions when my colleagues are done.

L. McCusker: My name is Lauren McCusker, and I'm a student at Thompson Rivers University. As a young person who is planning on having a family and building a life here in British Columbia, I have a very strong interest in the quality of services that are and will be available in this province.

I recently visited the women's shelter on West Seymour Street here in Kamloops and talked to a couple of the workers there, asking them: what's the relationship between women, poverty and violence? Women escaping violent relationships are quite often leaving at the great risk of entering a life of poverty. The barriers they face in leaving their abusive partner are so great that they often feel their only option is to return to violence.

The YWCA recently surveyed 238 women as part of a study on leaving violence in intimate relationships. They found that a large proportion of the reasons women return to violent relationships are related to basic needs. They stated that women are often faced with inadequate housing and financial support, which leaves them with a choice between homelessness and returning to their abusive partner. What women leaving violent relationships need is safe and affordable housing, adequate child care and government-provided coordinated services.

[B. Ralston in the chair.]

In the YWCA study, one significant recommendation they made is to improve access to safe and affordable permanent housing. I recently moved to Kamloops, so I definitely know how hard it is to find housing here.

[1100]

Finding any home at all — let alone a clean, affordable home in a safe neighbourhood — is extremely difficult. I'm sure any of us can imagine how this difficulty can be compounded when we have children to take care of and the threat of children's services being the only government service interested in our situation.

The YWCA also recommends improved access to affordable, high-quality child care to provide women with improved options. Women leaving a violent relationship need to find a way to support themselves, and when they have children, affordable child care is essential to this equation. Women can't look for work if they can't pay for child care, and they can't work if their wages aren't enough to cover child care, let alone their other expenses.

Finally, what women faced with poverty need is government-provided, coordinated services. Getting information about the services available to them, centralized and accessible, is key to women's success. I believe this has been referred to in the past as the single-window approach.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

Women need one place to go where they can get all the services they potentially need: housing, legal services, child care, income supplements, etc. This way, the service providers can work together, the right hand can know what the left hand is doing, and there would be no duplication of service. Ideally, a person could find all the services they need in one place. In fact, all they should need to do is show up, and the service providers will ask the right questions.

The government needs to work with women to design well-rounded programs to suit their needs. If we're going to provide social services in British Columbia, we must provide well-rounded and complete services. Subsidies need to be arranged to help manage and deal with situations, and measures are required to prevent women from going into poverty, as well as to help them get out. Most importantly, this government needs to work with its citizens to make this province all that it can be.

N. Lidster: Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. I'm Natalie Lidster, and I'm a first-year nursing student at Thompson Rivers University, the local university we have on the hill. I'm really happy and proud that I can call Kamloops my hometown.

When asked, "What is the relationship between women, poverty and violence?" one has to not only examine the ability for government to establish effective social services, but also our ability as a society to be both compassionate and just. I'd like to answer this question and build on the statements of Jane and Lauren from the perspective of a local street nurse. The

reality for many clients of this nurse is that without options, women either continue with their lifestyle of abuse and/or poverty or resort, most commonly, to survival sex.

[B. Ralston in the chair.]

For these women, prostitution isn't a choice that they've made; it's a necessity, and it leaves these women even more vulnerable to the violence that they have tried to escape. This nurse regularly encounters street workers who have been victimized by sexual, physical and emotional assaults. She emphasized some key points to empowering these women to escape violence and poverty.

Women need to be able to financially support themselves and their children. Adequate living expenses are far above the amount they currently receive. Both long-term and short-term affordable and safe housing needs to be readily available for all women and children so that support systems can be put in place as soon as possible. Without housing, women are at a greater risk of resorting to survival methods.

A streamlined, cohesive support system needs to be provided to women and children, because it is very difficult for women to access the social welfare system. It is increasingly and frustratingly bureaucratic. Women oftentimes find themselves repeating their stories to different parts of the system before finally accessing support. This is emotionally taxing for women who need immediate assistance. Coping and life skills are an essential part to completely removing women from a lifestyle of poverty and violence, because the more equipped women are to contribute to society, the less likely they are to repeat patterns that have led them into violent relationships or poverty.

This is the most important part, and this is the part I like to emphasize as well. Policy- and lawmakers need to believe that these women count and that their lives have meaning. Instead of making decisions affecting their welfare for them, please play an active role in empowering these women to be able to change the system in the most effective ways for them.

These recommendations need to be done not only to help women permanently remove themselves from the cycle of poverty and violence, but also to prevent other women from falling into it. Many of these women have children who learn from what they live, and if they see mothers who only have the option between poverty and violence, then I fear that the same speech will have to be made by the next generation.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Thanks very much. Questions from members?

[1105]

J. Horgan: Thank you very much for your presentation. It's certainly consistent with the one we just had and a couple of others we've had over the course of our deliberations.

One of the issues that you touched upon that is particularly intriguing and important... Certainly, in

my constituency — on lower Vancouver Island, near Victoria — we've tried to have areas where there are coordinated services. Can you tell us a little bit about what the challenges would be for a woman seeking assistance, whether it would be from income assistance, Children and Families or the Ministry of Health, within Kamloops? How do you access...? Is it three different stops with three different administrative processes, three different sets of forms?

L. McCusker: Yeah. I am new to the area, so I've only talked to a few people. The impression I've been left with is that a lot of women leave, and it's hard for them to get access to a phone or a phone book even to use. So they show up at the women's shelter. Often they can help them, but they have to call different places for different services, which can be very time-consuming, very trying — very emotionally trying, in particular.

Oftentimes they'll call one number, and for income assistance, they'll tell them what they need for that and what forms they need to sign and that sort of thing. But they don't tell them about what other services are available. So even for different areas to know what the other areas are doing is really important, I think, to getting everything out. I don't know if that answers your question very well.

J. Horgan: An absence of coordination is apparent. That's what we wanted to hear.

I. Black: First of all, Jane, if these two women are your students, you should be very proud of them. They are both extraordinarily articulate and well-spoken.

J. Birkbeck: Brilliant women, aren't they?

I. Black: Indeed.

J. Birkbeck: Oh, and nothing to do with me, let me tell you.

I. Black: I can see why you brought them with you.

One of the common themes that we've heard through a variety of presentations like yours — and I want to give you a chance to expand on this.... When you speak of the silo, if you will, among government and whether we're speaking of critical women's issues or whether we're speaking of mental illness issues, one of the common themes that runs through the middle of them is the housing situation.

To what degree would you concur that a lot of the other issues kind of revolve around that one? In other words, if you can solve that first step, then the other steps become more easy to address. Or is this different in this specific area that you're bringing to us today? I'm just curious where that fits in.

J. Birkbeck: You know, I think Lauren just spoke to that really well. If I have a safe roof over my head and

enough money to get a phone, then I'm really doing well when I leave my violent relationship. I'm in a neighbourhood with some trees. I can send my kids to school. So I think housing — safe, affordable housing — is really critical.

I would say it revolves around.... Of course, I've got to be able to pay my rent and feed my kids and all of that stuff. All of those things that.... Since you haven't asked the question, let me say that I love paying taxes.

I. Black: You're the only one to say that.

J. Birkbeck: If I didn't pay taxes, I'd have to hire my own police person, my own firefighter, my own ambulance driver, and I'd pay that extra money. These women would be paying \$6,000 a term for their education instead of \$1,500. They wouldn't be there, because they couldn't afford it. I love paying taxes, and I'm all for raising them to provide that, may I say, reasonable or just society.

I. Black: Well said. Nicely done.

J. Birkbeck: Thank you so much.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Our next presenter is Cynthia Davis. While we're waiting for Cynthia to come, I think Jenny wanted to make a request of the committee.

J. Kwan: The Kamloops Women's Resource Centre, as we heard from the previous presenters, is closing their doors today because of a lack of funding, and there is an emergency nature to this issue. I would ask the committee, through you, Mr. Chair, that a request to the Minister of Finance be made immediately to meet with the Women's Resource Centre around this issue. I think that it is important for the Minister of Finance to have that opportunity to discuss with these women about the issue, prior to....

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

In any event, I'll just state that and make that request. If you would do that, I know the women would appreciate it very much. I've spoken with them outside, and they would like that opportunity.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Jenny, I can follow through with the call. I'm not sure that would fit within our mandate. The worry I have is that in '04 that decision was made early on — that there are numerous other women's centres that have actually transitioned already.

I can follow through. I can't guarantee that I can coordinate a meeting. I'm hoping they've tried already to make that call.

[1110]

J. Kwan: Fair enough, Mr. Chair. Consistent with the other requests with some of the other organiza-

tions, where we saw.... For example, in the Ministry of Children and Family Development there was a crisis of some sort in a presentation. The request was made through you, Mr. Chair, to have the minister meet with the group.

The minister can say no, and I understand that. But I think that with this it's a consistent message we would like to give when we receive this information and we think that it's of an emergency nature — that government should be paying attention, that the minister should be paying attention to it and that all we could do is make the request.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Okay. Certainly, I think the ministers do pay attention. We're going to get into a bit of a political debate here versus the parliamentary committee.

I'll follow through on it. I'm encouraging them. Hopefully, they have made that request already versus asking our committee to make a request on their behalf.

Again, this is not new for any women's centre. This was certainly put forward two years in advance, I believe, of any of the funding changes. But I will follow through on that.

J. Kwan: Great. The funding cut kicked in a few years ago. You're right.

D. Hayer: I have a request that you talk to the local MLAs, to allow them to do their job right. Maybe talk to the women's centre. Maybe they can follow up with it, because at the end of the day, they're elected from here to represent this.... I think at least it's to treat them fairly. They should have an opportunity to talk to the....

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I will ensure that I contact the presenters here to find out what avenues they've taken to pursue this already and will act accordingly as a result.

Back to our presenters.

C. Davis: I know, sir, that some of the women's resource centre people are still here. I am willing to give up my 15 minutes at this point if the committee would like to keep that dialogue going with them.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): You know what? We don't have to. I can actually speak with them after. I just want to make sure.... We actually have a terms of reference given to us by the Legislative Assembly. Even if we all sat here and wanted to change those, we can't by law. That's what I'm cautioning our committee members on.

Cynthia, I welcome you to our committee.

C. Davis: I think you have handouts — double-sided to save the trees, of course. I have purposely kept my presentation very short, not only to help you save some time to maybe talk to other people but, hopefully, so that you also give weight to the issues that I've presented in it especially.

In 2003 all sexual assault centres in British Columbia lost 100 percent of their sexual assault centre pro-

gram dollars. Those dollars have never been replaced. For our centre in Kamloops, this loss equalled \$108,000, and we believe the impact of the loss of these service dollars to the Kamloops community was quite significant.

(1) It meant the elimination of this region's only crisis line, which had been providing quality service to needy individuals for 20 years. For the past three years this region has continued to have no crisis line, and the B.C. 800 VictimLINK or B.C. 800-SUICIDE lines will not talk to people who are in crisis in Kamloops because there are no crisis services to refer them to. They will, however, talk to people who are not in crisis.

For many years our sexual assault centre's crisis line services were the most effective and cost-efficient programs that our centre provided. This was primarily true because we had up to 70 very well-trained community volunteers each year to operate the crisis line services 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We were able to talk to individuals in crisis for up to an hour at a time if that was needed, and we believe that many victims' lives were saved as a result of these services.

[1115]

(2) Other important services impacted by the 2003 program funding cuts included the loss of free counselling available for male sexual assault survivors over the age of 19 in this community. This was especially impactful to our community because the majority of these males came to our centre for counselling when (a) they were getting married or (b) they were having their first child and they didn't want to repeat the cycle of abuse they had experienced.

(3) The loss of SART, which is the sexual assault response team for this community. It consisted of ten highly-trained volunteers and coordinated effectively with the hospital and police to respond to and assist serious cases of sexual assault and partner battering.

Those individuals that most accessed our crisis line services were women and teenagers in need. That is, they often had few economic and social resources. We average 600 serious calls to the crisis line per year as well as averaging 2,000 abuse information calls per year. Callers assessed as serious were those who had just been assaulted, were at imminent risk of violence or were presenting with high suicide ideation in the middle of the night.

For example, why Kamloops was so impacted — going off the record here on my speech.... When Kamloops lost our sexual assault dollars and the sexual assault crisis lines, we had no crisis lines and no information lines left in this community. And we still haven't three years later. When Kelowna, a comparable city, lost their sexual assault crisis lines, they had four crisis lines left. So they had those to continue with, where Kamloops had none.

One of the last callers we had before our crisis lines officially shut down was a 15-year-old girl from a community an hour away from Kamloops. She had come into town with friends against her parents' rules, had been sexually assaulted on the streets at midnight,

was taken by the RCMP to the hospital, was examined and then released into the parking lot at 3 a.m. She called our crisis line at 3 a.m., and because there were no services or help available until the 6 a.m. bus went back to her home community, our crisis line worker stayed with her at the Greyhound station until the morning bus left, in order to keep the young teenager safe.

There are countless, countless stories that look like that, and I think the speech you have heard over and over again is: "You have to have a place to make the phone call. You have to have a place to find information for services."

This is only one of countless examples of how specific incidences of specialized help can change people's lives for the better and actually help keep them alive. We are very concerned that many women and teens in the past three years have been seriously assaulted and perhaps killed because no crisis line was available in this community to help them. Because all women's resource centres across British Columbia also lost significant amounts of operating dollars three years ago, marginalized and impoverished women in our community have become much more at risk of slipping through the cracks of services and safety.

Also, this population cannot often speak or advocate for itself. That is, perhaps, one of the reasons we are seeing such high levels of homelessness and desperate women on the North Shore, near the friendship centre and by the riverbanks of Kamloops. These women are also ongoing victims of violence and sexual assault.

This is my third year presenting the same information and the same concerns to the B.C. Finance and Government Services Committee. No program dollars have yet been returned to sexual assault centres or crisis lines after either of my previous two presentations. However, I am ever hopeful. Should the B.C. government return the crisis line and sexual assault program dollars to our centre, we would work very hard to re-establish dynamic and humane crisis line services and counselling for male survivors of sexual abuse as quickly as possible for Kamloops and the surrounding region.

[1120]

We strongly urge the B.C. government to take seriously the safety and violence issues of the more marginalized and needy people in our province and to return funding to programs that had been so efficiently and effectively providing these services and support to the most victimized and least privileged populations in our society.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you, Cynthia. The issue that you touch on, not unlike many others that have presented on numerous occasions before.... As much as we would like to say that this committee has the ultimate say as to what's acted on and what's not, we have the ability to make recommendations. Then they're carried through, either accepted by the Legislative Assembly as a whole body report, and then the Minister of Finance utilizes it as one tool.

C. Davis: And you see I am ever hopeful.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I would remain that way as well.

Anyway, I want to thank you for your presentation. I'm going to look to see if there are questions of committee members.

J. Kwan: What services are available now in Kamloops, given that the crisis line — the sexual assault counselling line — has now been cut for three years? We just heard this morning from the Women's Resource Centre that they're closing their doors. It seems to me that the crisis of the nature of access for women to services in this area in the city of Kamloops has reached crisis proportions.

Maybe you can help the committee to understand where women could go for support of this nature?

C. Davis: Well, I think you're going to hear again about homelessness and, again, the no shelter beds. This, of course, has been an issue. Repeatedly there are no shelter beds for women in this community that don't have conditions attached to them, like not having any alcohol, any marijuana or any serious mental health conditions, etc. That, in fact, really impacts the most marginalized and the most needy women, who often have all of those issues when they are homeless or on the street.

To compare, there are 28 provincially funded beds for men in this community that don't have those conditions, let alone that there have been 50 or 60, probably, hostel beds for men at different times in this community and zero for women at different points, unless they're specific and related — like being a part of the Y women's emergency centre — and are specifically not for women in poverty but women who have just been battered, and for their children.

It's a very serious issue there. We have had, year after year, women who are on the streets. Again, like you heard from the speech beforehand and I'm sure a couple.... Women are at risk at night or they've been assaulted or they're at risk of being assaulted, and they often go with very unsafe men for sexual favours or for a roof over their head. Of course, that gets worse over the wintertime.

These are also women that are easily lost in the system, so that we have had.... It's unclear how many murders of women there have been in Kamloops in the past few years. The RCMP had said that, at one point in time, they were investigating between eight and 15 murders of women. We don't know where those are, because some of them are missing and some of them are in the river. They're groups that are lost. We can't find them.

R. Lee: Just a question. Do you have any transition houses in this area?

C. Davis: There is the Y Women's Emergency Shelter. That's for battered women.

R. Lee: That's the only transition house?

C. Davis: There are a few beds with the House of Ruth that, again, are for women in need, I think. I believe all those beds still have conditions around alcohol and mental health.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, Cynthia, again, I want to thank you for the work that you are doing on behalf of the people that you're speaking for. Obviously, you are passionate. You do a great job, and your voice has been heard. Again, I'm sure it will be discussed in our deliberations in the development of our report.

For our next presentation this morning I will call on Garry Worth. Good morning. Welcome to the committee, Garry.

[1125]

G. Worth: Good morning. My presentation this morning is on softwood lumber. I guess, the long and the short: it's such a bad deal for B.C. It's a little bit too long to go over, to read word for word, so I'm going to summarize it. So don't try to follow it. It's also, I think, got a bit of a B.C. focus, in the parts of the agreement that will affect B.C. the most.

A bit of my history is that I've worked in the forest industry since 1962, when I graduated from high school. I've been quite involved in the union movement for a lot of those years, in collective bargaining. During that collective bargaining, I've learned to discern a good deal from a bad deal. I'm not just saying that for political reasons but also for contract wording and contract clauses-wise. That's, I think, one of the biggest problems with this agreement. It just totally favours the Americans on most counts of the wording of the clauses.

Parliament is in the process of voting on the softwood lumber deal brokered between Harper and Bush. The softwood issue is complex, but most Canadians don't know a bad deal when they see one, and most Canadians don't want to be sold out to the Americans. Harper and the Conservative government wanted a deal, any deal, so they can go to the Canadian electorate in the next election to claim to have solved a longstanding dispute that the Liberals could not. Unfortunately, the proposed deal favours the Americans on most counts.

The refund of duties. As part of the settlement, the Canadian government is handing over a billion dollars in duties collected from Canadian companies: \$500 million to the coalition, \$50 million to a binational industry council and \$450 million to the Bush administration for meritorious initiatives. While it may be acceptable to take part of that cash in escrow for public goods such as education, disaster relief, charitable things like that, these initiatives should also apply to Canada.

The agreement creates no such funds for forest communities in Canada, nor is there any requirement that over \$4 billion in duties returned to Canada are actually reinvested by companies back into Canada. In fact, companies such as Canfor, Ainsworth, Interfor — companies that have done very well in this province — are actually investing their profits and, I would presume, duty refunds in sawmills in South Carolina, Washington, Oregon and in OSB mills in Maine and

Minnesota. At the same time, they're closing mills in B.C. or flipping their existing mills over to income and trust arrangements, which I don't think shows any long-term commitment to those mills.

The surge mechanism and regional quotas. Canadian exports to the U.S. are capped at 34 percent of U.S. share. If any region exceeds its share of exports for more than 1 percent of market share in any month, the applicable export tax is increased by 50 percent for all exports that month. The surge mechanism appears to be aimed at B.C. interior mills, the most profitable and efficient, which will also be handling a flood of hurriedly logged beetle wood in the next decade.

The regional quota for the B.C. coast is 1.8 share of U.S. consumption; interior is 17.8 share of U.S. consumption. The quota for the B.C. coast reflects the historic decline of that region as a lumber producer. It may well lock in that decline, resulting in even further mill closures and thousands more lost jobs on the coast.

The regional exemptions. This article is a so-called policy exit whereby a region can be excluded from export measures if it has changed provincial forest policies and implemented market reforms. Canada will provide quarterly reports to the U.S. on each provincial system of harvests, prices, volumes and changes in policy.

This is one of the most objectionable parts of the agreement. Canadian provinces will be led into a process of changing government policies to Americanize our forest policy practices. Once implemented, future governments will be locked into these regressive policies through a system of American monitoring and threat of reimposing quotas and export taxes. In other words, the provincial governments acquire a fiscal reporting system to the U.S.

Anti-circumvention. Canadian governments are prohibited from circumventing the agreement through any grants or benefit to manufacturers, exporters, producers of lumber. A specific measure relating to British Columbia states that any action which conflicts with measures in the June 6, 2006 documents, as disclosed to the U.S., may constitute circumvention.

[1130]

It would appear that this measure is worded specifically to inhibit any future B.C. government from reversing or changing the so-called market reforms or the market pricing system implemented by the Campbell government since they were elected in 2001.

Just briefly on the duration amendment and termination. The agreement is in place for seven years plus two. Other articles in the agreement effectively enable termination for a multitude of reasons. The agreement can be amended at any time by agreement of the parties. That's just the two parties — the two federal governments. Either party may terminate the agreement after 23 months after entry into force with one month's written notice. The ability to terminate the agreement early holds a U.S. coalition gun to the head of Canada intended to force Canadian authorities to self-discipline provinces on the threat of the U.S. exercising its right to abrogate the deal.

Unfortunately, the B.C. government ended up supporting a bad deal. The agreement was originally opposed by lumber industry groups in three provinces as

well as the B.C. government. They particularly opposed the agreement on several points — that provisions permitted the U.S. to terminate the deal, lumber produced from privately owned land exempt, the running rules, the scope of the agreement would capture the remanufacturing or value-added industry.

On August 16 Premier Gordon Campbell pledged the government of B.C.'s support for the softwood lumber agreement, saying: "We have received sufficient assurances that the province's concerns have been addressed." He went on to say the agreement will provide greater stability and certainty.

Unfortunately, after reviewing the final version of the softwood lumber agreement, it is doubtful that the concerns of B.C. were met in any meaningful way. Although B.C. has been marching toward a market pricing system for quite some time, the provisions in the agreement that impose monitoring and a quarterly fiscal reporting system to the U.S. will impose further Americanization of our forest practices. The deal doesn't provide any more stability or certainty than what the first framework agreement did that was rejected by B.C.

As a labour negotiator, I wish there could have been as many escape clauses in the collective agreement as there are in this lumber agreement.

The B.C. stipulation that timber from private land will be exempt from this agreement may very well be on a two-edged sword. The wording of the consultation process for additional exclusion is left uncertain in that the U.S. must agree. If we do win the exclusion of lumber produced from private land, will that change the policy or the amount of raw logs exported from B.C.? It doesn't look like it, the way it's going now.

TimberWest reported that it exported over 1.8 million cubic metres of logs in the first half of '06, up 30 percent from last year. Exports to Japan and other Asian markets are up by 44 percent. TimberWest has closed all but one of its mills on the coast, and that mill is for sale. B.C. log exports have doubled since '01 and have gone up ten times since 1996.

The softwood lumber agreement is not about limiting the amount of lumber we can ship to the U.S. It's about how they can get access to our raw logs — the same as Americans want access to all our other resources.

As for the status of the remanufacturing or value-added industry, it would appear that the only companies excluded were from Ontario and Quebec. I think this speaks volumes about the status of value-added industry in B.C. and confirms that this agreement is about access to resources.

The softwood lumber deal is a bad deal for Canada, a bad deal for B.C. and a bad deal for the communities and workers within our country. We were bludgeoned into it by a new government who were pushing it through for purely political reasons. We should have been steadfast on what we wanted and what we accept before we agreed on this deal.

Now, during my presentation, or at the end of it, I haven't said that we shouldn't have done the deal at all. I mean, when there's \$5 billion on the table, it's pretty naïve to think that if we sit down for "what if?" discus-

sions with the Americans that we're not going to come up with some kind of agreement. That's what we did, but the agreement is bad, and the clauses in it will have detrimental effects on Canada, I think, for years until, perhaps, lumber 5. This is the end of the lumber 4 agreement. We'll get into the lumber 5 agreement, and we'll go through it all again.

[1135]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): All right, Garry. Thank you. I guess the question, certainly as Chair of the committee, I have to ask is.... You're presenting to the Finance Committee, and we're asking for British Columbia's priorities on how we would budget and what we would do in next year's budget. I'm not sure that anything that you've presented today, other than "I don't like the softwood deal," has anything to do with our mandate that we're here for today.

G. Worth: This is still the main resource industry in the province that contributes, I would say — I don't know the percentage, the numbers — a lot of money to your financial....

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Oh no, I understand that. I'm just curious. Is the recommendation to have the feds not sign the agreement, vote it down...?

G. Worth: No. That's what I just said. No, I mean, the deal....

B. Lekstrom (Chair): That's why I'm just trying to get that out. That's what we're trying to get from British Columbians: "Here are my priorities. Here's where I think money could be better utilized. Here's where I would add or take away."

What I got was certainly your concern — and well-researched, obviously — on the softwood agreement.

G. Worth: Well, I hear you. But I think that Campbell should be hearing us. There are not that many committees going around the province, though, asking for input — right?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Certainly more since '01 than there were through the '90s.

B. Simpson: Well, if that's not a political statement, I'm not sure what is.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): It certainly was.

Interjections.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Okay. We're going to call back to order. We're going to end the discussion, and I do have that ability.

B. Simpson: Garry, it's a thoughtful and articulate response to softwood. You would do us a great favour if you took that same thoughtfulness and looked at

what is in the quarterly report. There is actually an assessment of the potential fiscal implications of the softwood deal.

G. Worth: The quarterly report that goes to the U.S.

B. Simpson: No. The quarterly report that just came out from the Ministry of Finance. There's an insert in there that looks at the fiscal implications of the softwood deal with respect to the potential impact for revenue to the Crown, how much we might accrue in border tax and some assumptions on pricing and what's going to happen with the market.

Given your understanding of the deal, it would be helpful to the committee if you went and actually looked at that, because those will be the implications that we will have to take into consideration. It has revenue impacts, and there may be another additional revenue stream from the border tax because that comes to the province.

If you could take a look at that and give us another submission that says, based on your knowledge of the deal and the softwood lumber industry, what you think of the government's assessment and some information to us about what you think the net impact might be fiscally, that would be very helpful.

G. Worth: Where do we get a copy of that? On the Internet?

B. Simpson: It will be on the website under the Ministry of Finance, and it will be the quarterly update.

G. Worth: Okay. Good.

I. Black: I just want a point of clarity on this, notwithstanding the Chair's comments.

Garry, you make the statement that B.C. logs exports have doubled since 2001 and have gone up ten times since 1996. Am I reading that correctly?

G. Worth: Right.

I. Black: If I'm following the math right on this — just a point of clarity.... If you pick the number five — for the sake of B.C. math — and if there were five trees exported in '01, that would say there were ten exported just now? That's the math — right? Doubled?

G. Worth: Could be. Yeah.

I. Black: So if it's gone up ten times since 1996, that says in 1996 there was one log exported. So between '96 and '01, then, it went up five times?

G. Worth: I think it did go up. I don't know the numbers specifically, but it did go up quite a lot.

I. Black: I'm just following the bouncing ball here. I just wanted to get that point of clarity. Okay, thanks.

G. Worth: I kind of anticipated this question, and I just want to say that I'm a member of the NDP. I have been for many years.

I. Black: That part didn't surprise me.

G. Worth: Unlike the two MLAs in this riding — and even the MP, which is far worse — I will criticize my party. I was criticizing David Zirnelt and Clark and others after 1996 when the export of raw logs was going up. I criticized them for that, and I'll do it today too. But they've gone up a lot more now, I think.

The policies of exported raw logs have changed. There are no limitations on it now. There is no.... What do you call it where jobs are left in the community?

Some Voices: Appurtenance.

G. Worth: Appurtenancy, transfer of tenure, claw-backs of tenure for private land — all of those things changed. The worst deal was Weyerhaeuser, when they did it here. They got away with millions of dollars.

Is that political?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): That is, but just one thing. The appurtenancy issue I fully understand, but there is still the responsibility of any raw log to be put to every one of our mills first. They have first crack.

[1140]

G. Worth: True, but there are processes around that.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Right. But there's no way that that has changed — right? That presentation of those logs to our local mills is still there. I just want to be clear on the record of that.

G. Worth: The rules are still there, but rules are made to be broken.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thanks, Garry, for coming out and presenting. And thank you, members, for that lively discussion.

Our next presentation this morning comes from Thompson Rivers University Students Union, and joining us are Nathan Lane and Terry Monteleone.

T. Monteleone: Good morning. My name is Terry Monteleone. This is Nathan Lane. He's our executive director at Thompson Rivers University. I'm here today to speak to you about the budget priorities of students and families in the Kamloops region.

The students union represents approximately 6,800 members. On behalf of those members, I'd like to thank everyone for the chance to provide our input into the province's budget priorities here today.

All too often when talking about post-secondary education, we forget that full-time-equivalents, student spaces and the many other terms we use, are actual real people and that policy decisions have a dramatic effect on their day-to-day lives. In fact, for many students,

policy decisions mean the difference between succeeding and falling through the cracks. At the students union we are reminded of this fact on a daily basis, as we see the real impacts of post-secondary education policy as we interact with the diversity of students at TRU.

Today we are here to be the voice of students at TRU and to express our concern about the growing lack of affordability of post-secondary education at TRU and in British Columbia in general. We are here to advance strong policy solutions that will address this concern and lead to positive change for students. Our recommendations balance financial realities with what is needed to improve the lives of students across the province.

Having said that, our first recommendation is that the government reduce tuition fees by 10 percent. Tuition and ancillary fees at TRU have increased over 200 percent in just five years. Statistics Canada's annual tuition fee survey shows that students in B.C. have gone from paying the second-lowest tuition fees in Canada in 2001 to paying a full \$650 above the national average. Meanwhile the tuition fees for students in many graduate and professional programs have increased even more dramatically.

At this rate, by next year the just over 450,000 students in the post-secondary system will be shelling out more than a billion dollars annually in tuition fees. It is low- and middle-income students who are being hit hardest by these increases and are being increasingly shut out of B.C.'s post-secondary system. Statistics Canada's youth in transition survey, a study now a few years old, found that 70 percent of high school graduates who didn't go on to pursue a post-secondary education didn't because of financial barriers. The cost of education has only increased since then.

The students who are being shut out are being shut out at a time when they are needed most. The time has long since passed when a British Columbian could expect to participate equally in the economy and society with a high school diploma. Our economy is increasingly demanding a post-secondary education, whether it be in the trades, hospitality sector, engineering or business. We need to ensure that those who want to can get the education, and if we are truly going to compete in the knowledge economy, we need to go further and have a long-term vision that provides incentive for young people to want to get that education.

A fully funded 10-percent reduction in tuition fees would be a large step in the right direction, an investment that will hold significant return for all British Columbians. This investment will go a long way towards relieving the significant financial burdens placed on students.

The average student at TRU would save approximately \$400 as a result of such an investment by the provincial government. A recent public opinion poll by Ipsos-Reid indicates that 80 percent of British Columbians support reducing tuition fees. We speak on behalf of students and the overwhelming majority of British Columbians, and we urge you today to recommend a 10-percent reduction in tuition fees in 2007.

Our second and one of our most urgent recommendations is that the B.C. government allocate fund-

ing in the 2007 budget to eliminate tuition fees for adult basic education across the board. Adult basic education courses give adults the chance to complete a high school diploma and allow adults to upgrade after time out of school in order to gain admission to colleges or universities. When tuition fees for adult basic education were first eliminated in 1998, it was in recognition of the fact that many adults who need these programs are not in the position to pay for the courses.

[1145]

Furthermore, B.C. has long recognized high school-level education as a basic right. It is profoundly unfair to charge adults, the vast majority of whom are under the poverty line, for this basic right. Unfortunately, tuition fees for adult basic education were deregulated in 2003 causing massive increases at many institutions and large enrolment drops across the province.

At TRU enrolment in adult basic education has dropped significantly since tuition fees were introduced. In 2001 TRU had over 1,000 students enrolled in development programs. By 2005 and 2006 this number had dropped to less than 600.

I could sit here and quote you facts and percentages for the next ten minutes about the impact of tuition ancillary fee increases on enrolment statistics, but instead I'd like to take some time to reflect with you on the actual experience of real students at Thompson Rivers University.

Included in our submission today you'll find a package from adult basic education stakeholders at TRU. You'll find a letter from the chair of the university preparation department, a letter from high school teachers in the Kamloops community and a letter from the students union calling for the immediate elimination of tuition fees for adult basic education. Finally, and most importantly, you'll find the testimonials of over 125 current ABE students from TRU expressing the importance of eliminating adult basic education tuition fees.

I won't read every letter here today, but I would ask the members of the committee to do so over the course of your work. You don't have to read very far into the package before you realize the impact that the implementation of tuition fees for adult basic education has had on these students and their colleagues. Hopefully, this package will provide you with the insight necessary to ensure that we as a province do not continue to penalize some of our most vulnerable brothers and sisters for working to achieve a more equitable standing.

Tuition fees are as high as \$200 for adult basic education courses at TRU. As you'll find in these letters, \$200 can mean food on the table, adequate clothing or enough to pay the rent for these students. We urge the committee to consider this and recommend the allocation of just \$17 million to fund the elimination of all tuition fees charged for adult basic education courses in British Columbia.

Our third proposal in this area of student financial aid. This year the government will forgive approximately \$68 million in student debt. While this is by no means small change, it is still far from where we should be in terms of helping the students with the

highest need. The former grants program was an \$80 million program that operated when tuition fees were almost half of what they are now.

The effect of this shortfall on student debt that has rapidly increased from amongst the lowest in the country to the national average and beyond in just a few short years? It means that students part-way through their degrees stopped getting their needs met and dropped out for whole semesters, for years or more, and it means one barrier keeping low- and middle-income youth out of post-secondary education systems.

Meanwhile the structure of the current loan reduction program is not beneficial to students. It is difficult to navigate and does not provide a stable amount of funding, which would allow students and families to budget over the long term. Furthermore, it does not include graduate students. Because of undergraduate loans these students often have great need for grants as well, and B.C. is one of the few jurisdictions that does not provide them to graduates.

Therefore, our proposal is: create an upfront, needs-based grants system inclusive of all students in B.C. and reinvest \$12 million back into this program. There are many options for what B.C. can do with money set aside for student financial assistance. We propose B.C. choose the option that most benefits students. The most efficient and simplest form of student financial assistance is upfront, needs-based programs.

In closing, budgets are about choice. The choices made in the 2007 budget will determine whether students from average- and low-income backgrounds can get the education they need to achieve not only their goals but B.C.'s goals. We urge this committee seriously to consider the B.C. government's goal of making B.C. the most educated jurisdiction in North America. The 2007 budget must reflect this goal by making investment in post-secondary education a top priority. Thank you very much.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, thank you, Terry. Thank you, Nathan, for coming to present.

I'm willing to see if members of the committee have any questions.

H. Bloy: We've heard about the adult basic education, and similar presentations have been made by all the schools. One of the things that varies a little bit, I guess, is on the different tuitions. Okanagan College quoted \$300, UBC Okanagan was \$500, and you're \$400. There are lots of numbers out there.

[1150]

My understanding is that when you talk about tuition you have to really compare apples to apples. B.C. actually stands about number five at the low end of the tuition scale, ahead of Ontario and Alberta and a couple of east coast provinces. That's my understanding on where it's at. So when you use that we're now ninth or tenth, it just depends what programs you're using. I think you have to put it all in.

Right now we have the highest registration ever in British Columbia at over 425,000 students registered at universities and colleges, part-time and full-time.

T. Monteleone: I see your point in talking about the numbers, but at the same time, I did provide you guys with the information there with the numerous ABE students that did put their voices and concerns in....

H. Bloy: No, I appreciate that.

T. Monteleone: What I'm trying to get at is the fact that we might be doing a decent job at this, but this is still not enough, having seen those reports and letters. Some students have been put in very, very serious situations, and they're not able to do the things they want to do. Even though we're still better than others, we're still not as good and where we want to be, I think.

H. Bloy: No, I appreciate that too.

N. Lane: I think there are really two issues that you talked about: tuition fees and tuition fees for adult basic education. The standard comparison for tuition fees is a full-time undergraduate student. That's what they use to compare, so it really is comparing apples to apples across the board. Obviously, you'd have to compare different programs across the board, but the comparison we stated was definitely comparing apples to apples.

I think the enrolment numbers you talked about with adult basic education....

H. Bloy: No, no. That's full-time university and college students.

N. Lane: Yeah, full-time university and college students taking an undergraduate arts degree.

H. Bloy: Full-time and part-time — 425,000.

N. Lane: Yes, absolutely. With adult basic education students, though, the most vulnerable in our institutions, I think if you would look at the service reports across the province.... I know for a fact that at Thompson Rivers University enrolment has declined drastically. The note, for example, in our institutions report says we haven't met our FTE requirement in a number of years, and we don't anticipate that we will again.

In the programs that are helping the most vulnerable students — minorities, women, first nations students — enrolment is plummeting across the board in British Columbia. That's a fact that is being translated by almost all institutions.

R. Lee: Just getting through the pages. One is saying that at some colleges — for example, the College of the Rockies — the courses are offered free. So it seems that some colleges are managing, that the fee....

N. Lane: Absolutely. Since adult basic education fees were deregulated, some institutions have recog-

nized the importance of that as a stepping stone into university and college — that those people go on to convocate, to pay taxes, to contribute to their community — and have decided to make them free. Some institutions have decided to charge even more than actual college courses, so it varies from institution to institution. Some have made it a priority, and some haven't. At TRU, the case is that we haven't, and there is a charge for those students.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Nathan, maybe if I could just close with a comment. The issue of deregulation, I think, was when the tuition freeze was lifted, and then it was wide open. I think it is reregulated now in the sense that it's tied to no greater than the cost-of-living increase on that. So in a sense it's no longer deregulated. We have a regulatory environment in which it can't exceed a set amount, which I think is welcome news, versus the wide open, where it was. We've heard that.

I thank you for coming and presenting on behalf of the students you represent and on behalf of people seeking a post-secondary education.

Our next presentation this morning is from Charlene Yow. Good morning. Welcome to the committee.

C. Yow: My name is Charlene Yow. I'm a registered nurse with the native health centre over on the North Shore — that's located at the Interior Indian Friendship Society — and I've been there for approximately 11 years.

How it works at the health centre is that we provide a wide range of services. It is the friendship centre, but we look at trends. The trend that I've noticed lately isn't a new one. It was one that was identified probably in 2001. It's related to homelessness in general but, specifically, to women and homelessness.

[1155]

I had probably two cases recently, where one lady came from the lower mainland and.... It is kind of related to transitional homelessness. They come to Kamloops for whatever reason and then find themselves homeless. I and about half a dozen other community front-line workers probably spent about 40 hours working with this lady. The end result was that she ended up back down in the lower mainland. We put her on a bus because our community had nothing to offer her. In her particular case, the issue was mental illness.

Then the other particular type of client we get who I find really difficult to help is women who are still active in their addictions. We have probably five housing units in Kamloops that are considered affordable housing. The emergency shelters we have are good. We have the Y, and then we have the House of Ruth. For those women who meet the criteria, they definitely assist them to meet their needs. But again, it's meeting their needs in a short-term way. It's temporary relief, so what we see is a cycle of homelessness.

Probably over the past six months, though, when I consulted with other workers at the friendship centre,

of which there are 30.... We've dealt with 80 women from the ages of 19 to 55. Primarily all of them were aboriginal. All of them reported that helping these women meet their needs or developing care plans, either with them or other workers in the community, was extremely difficult. The reasons were, as I just cited, that they're still active in their addictions, mental health issues.... Wait-lists for beds in detox and other residential facilities are long, and options for women who are waiting for these beds are extremely limited.

In fact, a woman who is in her addictions.... Say her drug of choice is cocaine. If she's made the decision to go to detox and is told that the wait-list is up to ten days, it can send them out onto the street again, and we lose them for another three months. The implication for that, as I have seen, is they're engaging in behaviours that are risky, behaviours that they wouldn't engage in if there were beds waiting for them when they made these decisions.

The types of decisions they make are that they couch surf. They engage in intimate relations with people that they don't know for the sake of having a place to sleep. They engage in the sex trade, either full-time or part-time, to help themselves or to support their children. While they're engaged in the sex trade, these women are sometimes raped by one or more men. They're beaten; they're sodomized. In fact, I was at a court case a couple of years ago for that particular reason.

They're robbed; they're humiliated. They're stranded in remote areas, infected with one or more communicable diseases — some of which are curable and some of which are not. Sometimes they're murdered, or they burn on the riverbank. Recently in the last year a young native woman burnt on the riverbanks.

To make a long story short, what I would like to see in Kamloops is two types of housing: more affordable housing for women in general and affordable housing for women who are still active in their addictions and for women with mental health issues.

Recently I was reading in the newspaper a plea for increases for women who are on social assistance and, in particular, increases for a living allowance. I think that with aboriginal people we have the worst health. I don't think the challenges that we suffer are unique to aboriginal people, but they're definitely compounded by all the social determinants like poverty, lack of education, parenting skills, etc.

That's it. Thanks for listening to me.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, Charlene, thank you very much. You certainly, as many of our presenters, are passionate about what you do to help everybody. If you want, there may be a couple of questions. I'm not sure.

J. Kwan: I wonder if you could elaborate on the homelessness situation that you see in your community. You mentioned that you now see people who are homeless between the ages of nine and 55.

C. Yow: Nineteen to 55.

J. Kwan: Nineteen to 55. In terms of permanent housing, are you able to place the people who need housing into permanent housing? If not, what happens to them?

[1200]

C. Yow: Generally what happens is, as I was saying, we use the two resources that we have for emergency shelter, which are the House of Ruth.... It doesn't fit for all, because it's spiritual-based or religious-based. Then there's the women's Y emergency shelter. That's for women who experience abuse or, for the sake of having someplace to stay, will go there and say that they're being abused.

More often than not, the clients we get that I find a real challenge to help are the women with mental health issues or women who are still active in their addictions. These two particular places won't take women with acute mental illness or who are still active in their addictions, because they provide services not only to women but to their children. That's totally understandable, but it makes it very difficult for people like me who are on the front line trying to find a permanent type of housing for these women.

I took seven months off last year, and I came back and what I found.... If anyone is from here and has read our local newspaper, what was happening on my street that I work on, which is Palm Street and Royal Avenue, was basically the development of a mini-east side. It was primarily aboriginal men and women, but what I was seeing was men blatantly trying to buy sex from the women on the street, people across the street sleeping in the bushes, girls taking guys into the bushes with their tricks, needles hanging out of their arms, and smoking crack right in public.

The first people that I woke up to were the RCMP and the ambulance; the last people that I was seeing were the police and the ambulance. I don't think the problem that developed while I was away was new. It was a problem that was downtown, right here in front of Coast Canadian Inn. The downtown business association and the residents and the RCMP were successful in interrupting that behaviour here, but it moved over to the North Shore.

The girls still are homeless. They still work the streets, and they couch surf. Some are successful, I think, in finding shelter. As I said, because of a lack of resources for women in their addictions and the long wait-lists — not only to get in to see mental health workers but detox — more often than not, they end up back on the streets. It's cyclical, and they do the revolving door not only with Corrections but with us. Emerg probably sees these women.

I've talked to some of the RCMP officers, and what happens is that they pick them up off the streets, bring them to emerg because they need to be assessed because they might be a bit intoxicated. Or they are assessed, and maybe they think they're on some type of drug, so they put them in the city cells. Then they release them onto the streets. It's just cyclical because there's nowhere for these women to go. There are no resources for them.

What I thought was really horrible, not only for them but for front-line workers, was when this new government starting cutting off all these people from

social assistance and was encouraging them to go back out into the workforce. I don't have a problem with that. Our ancestors worked, and so should everybody else, but it's how they do it.

Some of these people reported to me that they were on social assistance for 20 years, and then all of a sudden they were told that they were going to get cut off and were supposed to go to work. Well, with grade 6 education and the only job skill is having worked on a chicken farm 20 years ago, I would be really frightened too. In fact, that would induce suicidal thoughts and other types of mental health disorders, which people were reporting to me as a result of being cut from social assistance or threatened to be cut off from social assistance.

Does that make sense?

J. Kwan: Yeah, it does.

J. Horgan: Thank you, Charlene. As I was formulating my question, you answered most of it. You've mentioned, and others that we've been listening to have talked about, people who are still active in their addictions.

As a front-line worker, how do we as legislators address that problem? Is it more front-line workers? Is it more resources for capital for housing? You've touched on all these things, but it comes back to: if someone is active in their addictions or has a mental health issue that's not diagnosed or not being treated, then what's the recourse? How do we solve the problem? In a perfect world, if you were running the show, what would you do?

C. Yow: Whenever I look at problem-solving, I try to look at it from four streams. One is the role that I would play as a front-line worker; the role that the client would play; the role that the agency would play; and then, of course, the role that the system would play.

[1205]

It is very difficult to help people who don't want to be helped, but as I said, I haven't met one person out on the street.... And I know who all the new kids are on the block. I know all of the people who are out on the streets. I know most of the sex trade.

I actually feel quite privileged because they don't access health care services like everybody else, and not everyone is able to provide services just because they don't reach out. But when they do, I guess that's the issue for me when they say to me, "I don't like it here. I would rather be somewhere else," and we call up mental health, and no one will answer the phone.

I would hate to be a depressed person here in Kamloops or someone who was wanting to commit suicide. More often than not, my experience is.... I'm not knocking mental health, because they're part of our team, and they provide.... But I think they're overworked and underpaid, and they don't have the money.

You phone up Kamloops Mental Health sometimes and you get an answering machine: "Thank you for calling Kamloops Mental Health. We're either with a client or away from our desk, and we'll return your call." Sometimes we don't get a call from them until the next day. When we call up detox, when the girls say to

me, "Can we go? We want to go to detox...." If I were addicted, I would find it really challenging if they were to tell me that I had a seven- to ten-day wait.

You have to also realize that it's not only just that. These women are homeless, living on the riverbanks. They don't have access to phones, so the referral process involves them having to pick up the phone every day to see if there's a bed. Some of the women are telling me they're washing their clothes on the riverbanks.

I don't know what they're going to do within the next couple of months — probably what they do every other year. Like the men, when it starts to get really cold, they engage in criminal activity so that they can get picked up and put in jail, because there they don't have to worry. Then we see them on the street again in the spring. That's the pattern for them.

I think an increase in social services, increases in moneys for addictions and mental health issues, more social programming for these women — and men.... It's not just the women, but I'm particularly passionate about women because I think women are more vulnerable out on the streets, just from what they tell me and what I see on a day-to-day basis. Opportunities for them to go back to school, better day care, better relationships built with MC Family. Half of our children in British Columbia are in care. I think it went from 44 to 49; those were the 2006 statistics from MCFD.

I don't think any of the answers are easy. I think they're multidisciplinary. I think my frustration with not only this government but the last government is that they've always encouraged to not duplicate the services, to communicate better. What I have seen is when MCFD or when the Ministry of Human Resources is doing what they're doing in terms of cutting people off from social assistance....

Again, like I tell my clients, I don't have a problem with that. It's how they're doing it. There's no consultation with other ministries that I can see that says to me that they're communicating with each other and they're planning the implications they will have on that person's health, because we all know that good health isn't merely the absence of disease.

Does that make sense? I think that when we're developing care plans, we're working with the whole team. I don't see that in the government. I don't think they would do that on purpose. I don't think that they would cut people off social assistance abruptly and not take into consideration, at the Ministry of Health, the implications that would have on one's health status.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Charlene, we do have one more question, and I'm going to try and squeeze it in here. Our time is.... Sorry to interrupt you.

D. Hayer: You're doing a good job of looking after the most vulnerable. I want to say thank you, and good presentation.

My question is.... When I was talking to the people in Surrey, people on social services.... Before they were put back to work, they were training them. I went to some of the classes where the workers were really

happy about it. They said they were very successful. A lot of them were going to construction jobs and other jobs. These were the women. They said that they got jobs; they're making good money. And here, they didn't have any program where they were actually training them before they would send them to look for work or something?

[1210]

C. Yow: Yeah, they have a few programs in here that were contracted, I guess, by the ministry, where women can go, do an intake process, develop plans with these workers and then hopefully get them out into the workforce. But I think for a lot of our own people, my experience is it's kind of like a life skills thing, like going from being at home, being on social assistance for 20 years and then having someone offer a life skills program. I think sometimes it's a pre-life skills program that they need before going into a life skills program.

I'm not saying that's good. I think there are a lot of good programs. I think our community is really rich in resources. But it's those two particular gaps, I think. It's not being able to help women who are still active in their addictions and mental illness. It's a little bit easier for women who are homeless. The services we have aren't appropriate for all. They aren't able to help all of our clients that we serve.

Does that answer your question?

D. Hayer: Yeah. That's good.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Charlene, thank you for taking time out of your schedule.

C. Yow: Thank you for listening to me.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Our next presentation comes to us from the Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association, and presenting is Dr. Thomas Friedman. Good afternoon.

T. Friedman: Good afternoon. Mr. Chair and members of the committee, let me thank you, first of all, for an opportunity to present the views of my members on the prebudget consultation process.

The Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association represents 650 academic staff at our new university, which was created in April of last year. We're very proud of the fact that all of our instructors, counsellors, librarians and educational coordinators are really working hard to fulfil the mandate that your Legislature gave to our institution.

One of the strengths of our institution is our comprehensiveness. We have not only degree programs in common with other universities, but we also have developmental education programs. We have career and technical programs. We also have an open learning division, which is meant to fulfil the open learning educational needs of all British Columbians.

Today I want to focus on our prime mission, which is to serve the educational needs of our region. One

important factor in fulfilling that regional mandate is that we require the funding that would enable us to meet those needs. I want to focus just on a few of those particular needs.

First of all, the needs of smaller communities in our region. We have an obligation to not only meet the needs of people in Kamloops and Williams Lake, where our two campuses are, but also to meet the needs of those learners in Clearwater, Barriere, Lillooet, Lytton and other areas where there really is a demonstrated need for education, particularly among our first nations communities. We need to receive better support from the provincial government to meet those goals. It's very expensive to run regional programs, and yet it's essential, in our view, for British Columbians to have equal access to post-secondary education.

Let me talk about some general problems in the system that I think need to be addressed through the budgetary process and then focus more narrowly on Thompson Rivers University. You'll see from my written submission that we have a lot of concern with the 2002 deregulation of tuition fees, which saw an incredible rise in the cost of a public post-secondary education for our students.

Despite the fact that there's been an attempt to regulate tuition, these fees have gone up by 100 percent to 120 percent at Thompson Rivers University, depending on the program area. I provide some statistics, also, on how tuition fees have now been really taken.... Up to 30 percent of the operating costs of the university are now covered by tuition fees, where when many of us went to university, that was really about 15 percent to 18 percent.

The effect of this is particularly felt among those who are most in need of education in our society, I would argue. The previous speaker made the point that I was going to make. The most vulnerable members of our society need to have an education that will allow them to get out of a life of dependency and reliance on income assistance and become productive members of society.

[1215]

That area of our mandate, developmental education, is really suffering the most because of the tuition fee imposition. Statistics that were released yesterday by the TRU senate show that enrolments in what we call adult basic education — those are the programs that give fundamental skills to our learners — have fallen by 21 percent in one year. It doesn't mean that there are 21 percent fewer people needing those courses; it means that those individuals no longer can afford to pay tuition fees.

The cost of education involves not only tuition fees, of course. It's also the cost of transportation to and from our campuses, and other support services that are required in order for people to be successful.

The problems in the system are not just to do with tuition fees. It's also to do with funding. I urge you to look at the last five years of budgets from the Ministry of Advanced Education to see that we're not keeping pace with the inflation rate. What we're calling for is a return to the funding levels of five years ago.

At TRU, in particular, we have a challenge that is quite different from some of our fellow universities in

the province. We're a brand-new institution as a university, and we require the infrastructure and the operating support to enable us to be a credible university. We're doing an excellent job at educating students, but we can do a lot better.

I believe that when your committee makes its recommendations to the Legislature and to Treasury Board on budgetary priorities, one of the things that you should be looking at is how to strengthen our public post-secondary system. I'm going to provide you with some specific, targeted recommendations that we'd like you to consider — for the system first and then for TRU.

First, we'd like to restore the cuts to the operating grants to institutions across the board, at least to the level that they were at in 2001. Second, we'd like adult basic education to be tuition-free. We think it should be a priority for the system: make sure that people can get their fundamental skills. Many of the ABE students then go on to take certificate, diploma or degree programs, and that's what we want to see. We want to see the Premier's goal of us being the most literate jurisdiction in Canada really fulfilled. The only way we can do that is through adequate funding and through providing ABE tuition-free opportunities for our citizens.

We'd like a reduction in tuition fees. We support the Canadian Federation of Students, who have called on the government to reduce tuition fees. We think that's the way to encourage more participation in post-secondary education. We'd like — certainly, we share the view of the TRU Student Union — improvements in student grants. We think that's really important. We don't want students burdened with debt for decades after they graduate from university.

For TRU in particular, we're calling first of all on your committee to make a recommendation that the Premier's commitment to help our university build a new library is fulfilled. That was made in March 2005, at the time the new university received its name. We think that's an important aspect of creating a university in more than just name. A library is the cornerstone of any university, particularly when you have a new university that's trying to establish its credentials across the country.

Second, we understand that the review of funding of TRU by Dan Perrin.... The recommendations, I think, are very positive, and we urge your committee to make a recommendation that those Perrin review recommendations are implemented by the ministry in its annual budget. We think that funding our university at the same level as other universities is going to be essential in meeting our obligations and fulfilling the educational needs of our region.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to address the committee, and I certainly will welcome any questions you have.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much, Dr. Friedman.

[1220]

D. Hayer: Thank you very much, Dr. Friedman. A good presentation.

I used to be a governor of Kwantlen University College — back in 1999, 2000, 2001 — until the election. I was talking to Skip Triplett, who is the president of Kwantlen University College, and he had told me that we were getting more funding than in 1999, 2000, 2001, although we could always use more.

Another part I was talking to him about was not having enough students, and he was saying that part of the problem seemed to be because there are so many jobs available right now, which is much different than before 2001. You can find jobs now. They can't find the workers. We have a challenging time to get people to stay in the system. Some of them are becoming part-time rather than full-time. Do you think maybe it has something to do with the economy — a lot of jobs available? That's why there are fewer students.

Second thing: this funding cut you talk about, from 2001 till now. Maybe you can provide more information to us so it doesn't contradict what I heard from there.

T. Friedman: No, there's no contradiction. Certainly, there has been more funding to the system, but it's not keeping pace with the true costs of running our institutions. My statistics that I've found show that we've had a 9-percent increase in funding since 2001, but the actual inflation rate is running at about 12.5 percent for that same period. Obviously, there's a gap.

In terms of enrolment, I agree that the economic situation now means that some potential students are going into the workforce. One of the reasons why they're doing that is they know that in order to get a university education they have to have a considerable amount of money put aside before they start education. Certainly, under the current economic conditions that's a possibility.

What I'm afraid of is that if our economy in the future — and the Minister of Finance seems to agree with my view — does not maintain its current level of productivity, we're facing a situation where these individuals won't have seats in our university and college system. Its capacity is a very important issue. We have to have the capacity to meet those needs. When the jobs disappear — and they might very well disappear in the future — we want to make sure people can at least get the training they need to get, perhaps, more lucrative jobs.

R. Lee: I'll just follow up on Dave's question. We are into a three-year budget process, so you would know the financial situation or the income allocation from the government in the year 2007-2008 — the next financial year. From the information we heard yesterday, the University of B.C. Okanagan would get a 2.2-percent increase over the years since 2001. Do you know the number for TRU?

T. Friedman: From what I understand, it's very similar to that increase.

Let me tell you that there's a great difference between UBC and TRU. One is that UBC is an established university, with also quite a large endowment fund which they can draw on. TRU is still a new institution

in terms of its university status. What we need to have is the creation of an infrastructure that will enable us to do research, to fulfil partnerships with the business community and with arts and culture groups. UBC Okanagan has the advantage of having an already established parent, so to speak, in Vancouver that can provide a lot of those fundamentals that we don't have as an institution.

R. Lee: Thank you for that clarification.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): The final question is from Jenny.

J. Kwan: I just want to follow up on the ABE numbers. You mentioned that there's declining enrolment by 21 percent. Do you have the year-to-year comparison figures on ABE numbers so that we can see whether or not there's a trend happening? I suspect that there may well be.

Further, the recommendation of this Dan Perrin report that you talked about, this review — do you have a copy of it? If you do, can you submit a copy to the committee for our review so that we get a fuller sense of the recommendations that you're talking about?

[1225]

T. Friedman: Let me start with the Perrin report. I don't have a copy of the report. The report was commissioned by the ministry as part of its funding formula review.

The information I have comes from our administration at Thompson Rivers, saying that the report's recommendations have been submitted to the ministry and that they're very positive for our institution in terms of the funding structure. So I would certainly try my best to get a copy, but I know that the Minister of Advanced Education would have that — either that, or the deputy minister.

In the other question... I welcome that question, because one of the concerns of our faculty members right across the province is that they see the drop in enrolment in ABE as a trend. When tuition fees were imposed, we went to our board of governors and said that the potential is lack of access for those people who really need the fundamental educational skills. We're also talking about transition programs from income assistance to the workforce, and these are extremely valuable for British Columbia in a lot of different ways.

The trend is definitely there. This last year-over-year change is the most dramatic, but since 2001 our enrolment has gone from — as the student union reps told you already — about 1,000 to fewer than 350. That's quite a dramatic decrease in that five-year period.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Dr. Friedman, I want to thank you again for taking time out of what I am sure is a very busy schedule to come and present to our committee.

J. Kwan: Just to follow up on this report, I wonder, Mr. Chair, if you could ask the Ministry of Advanced Education to provide the committee with it. Then we

will know more extensively what the recommendations are and then will be able to consider that as part of the presentation that we put forward.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I can follow through on that, definitely.

Our next presentation this afternoon comes to us from the Aging and Health Research Centre. Joining us is Dr. Wendy Hulko. Good afternoon.

W. Hulko: Good afternoon, and thank you for this opportunity to be here to talk about older adults in Kamloops.

Dignity, independence, fairness, security, participation: these are the five principles of the National Framework on Aging, developed for the International Year of Older Persons in 1999 through focus groups with older adults and approved by the federal-provincial-territorial ministers responsible for seniors. These five principles — dignity, independence, fairness, participation and security — are meant to guide the development and evaluation of policies that affect seniors and to promote the overall health and well-being of older adults.

Let's take a look at how these principles apply to government services for older adults in the interior. The interior, as you may know, shares with Vancouver Island the honour of having the highest proportion of older adults in the province: 16 percent of our population is aged 65-plus. Yet in this region we've faced the greatest reduction in residential care beds, and it appears that other government services cannot be said to demonstrate a clear commitment to dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security for older adults.

Older adults and other citizens in the interior have experienced a 29-percent reduction in residential care beds between 2001 and 2004 — more than any of the other four health authorities and double that of the two health authorities on the coast. When assisted-living beds are taken into consideration, the figure drops only slightly, to 25 percent. That's a quarter fewer beds than in 2001, a time when there were fewer older people in need of care, according to demographic projections.

Does this have the appearance of fairness? Currently there are 1,190 assisted-living units in the Interior Health Authority; 684, or 58 percent of them, are publicly funded. By contrast, 77 percent of Vancouver Island Health Authority, the other region with the highest proportion of older people.... There the assisted-living facilities that are publicly funded are 77 percent. Not only do we have fewer residential care beds than other areas of the province, but a greater number of these beds are in private facilities — minimally regulated private facilities.

[1230]

Does the privatization of residential and home support services promote the independence of older adults? Certainly not. It leaves more senior citizens who are needing services dependent on their families and neighbours and oftentimes forced to choose between medications or groceries, as an example.

One participant in an Alzheimer Canada-funded research study on support services in dementia care

told me about her attempt to gain support services for her husband who has Alzheimer's disease. She reported that they were not considered needy enough for publicly funded services. Rather, IHA — Interior Health Authority — suggested she pay for a personal support worker to make lunch for her husband rather than spending her own lunch hour travelling to and from work in order to do this.

This family could not afford to pay for private support services. As the woman told me, she makes \$19 per hour as a secretary, so why would she pay somebody else \$20 per hour to make her husband lunch?

Consider another couple from the same study. Both are retired. He has Alzheimer's disease, and she is caring for him. Having been told the importance of early detection and early intervention, they contacted IHA for an assessment as soon as it looked like the husband might be in need of some help with his activities of daily living. She was asked if her husband was still able to dress himself and answered yes. Well, that is yes if she first lays out the clothes for him and then she helps him to redress when he appears with the clothes on inside out or back to front. In other words, with support.

Not being a priority for assessment, they are still awaiting services, although they have identified that the day services program here would benefit both of them and would enable the wife to continue in her caregiving role without endangering her own health.

Three months after the first call he had still not been assessed and was growing increasingly restless and more dependent on his wife for social stimulation. She was feeling desperate, so she called IHA again and broke down over the phone. It seemed to have some kind of an impact. As a result, her husband's priority status changed, and the couple was told it should only be two more months for an assessment for home and community care to enable this older man to remain at home and to support his wife to continue providing him with love and care, independence, security, dignity.

The concerns of those working in health care in the interior echo those of older adults attempting to access care or support. Deregulation and contracting-out have resulted in no or low standards of care and in the hiring of staff with less training and qualifications. There are nursing and kitchen staff that do not have their tickets, and as a result, mistakes are being made.

Example. Fentanyl patch is being replaced every day rather than every three days as prescribed, without removing the other two, resulting in overmedication of the resident.

Example. Swabs and samples not being sent to the lab. The sample of a very ill woman sat in the nurses' cooler for seven days. She died shortly after that.

Example. Baths get missed and do not get rescheduled. There are no baths on statutory holidays, which could mean a resident not being bathed for three weeks. Can any of you imagine going three weeks without a bath?

Private elder-care companies make their money by cutting back on the care provided or decreasing wages of the workers, among other cost-cutting measures. Either way, it's older adults who are suffering.

Employers are having trouble recruiting people into health care due to the working conditions and the low quality of care. Due to the current design and delivery of health care services in this province, elder-care agencies cannot get enough workers from the local community and have to hire people from Vancouver or Prince George and then pay food, lodging and transportation for these workers. The BSW student who collected these stories rightly asked: "Wouldn't a local person have a better sense of how to ensure dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security for older adults in this community?"

At a recent public forum on housing options for older people in Kamloops, Charmaine Spencer of SFU's Gerontology Research Centre described the senior squeeze: decreasing availability of affordable housing, reduction of publicly funded home support and acceptance into publicly funded facilities only of those seniors needing complex care. This results in older adults struggling to make ends meet and attempting to manage their care on their own with few resources and little security.

To illustrate this, I will share three stories from older adults who volunteer at the Kamloops Food Bank, as told to BSW student Christina Spina. In her words:

"The first woman I spoke with was 71 years old, and her source of income is CPP, old age security and guaranteed income supplement. She said she's frustrated because she's having trouble paying for her prescriptions. Before, she only had to pay a dispensing fee, and now she has to pay a lot more. She wasn't sure of the exact percent increase. There's a medication that her doctor suggested that would make her physical conditions a lot more manageable, but she can't afford it, so she has to do without it.

"Her biggest concern was that there is no affordable housing for older people in Kamloops."

[1235]

This is something we heard a great deal about at the symposium.

"She said that she doesn't feel comfortable living in the low-income housing areas because she's been robbed multiple times both in her home and on the street. She doesn't feel comfortable or safe living around so many people who use drugs or who sell drugs out of their own homes. At the moment she's living in a basement suite that costs her close to \$800 a month. She receives about \$1,100 a month, so after she pays for utilities and food, she has no money left over for anything else."

I realize that income security for older people is a federal responsibility. However, it's interrelated with health here, which is provincial.

The second older lady that this student spoke with is 68 years old and is receiving CPP, old age security and guaranteed income supplement. Her biggest concern, which she would really like to see some action taken towards, is the housing situation for older people in Kamloops. She also lives in a basement suite on the North Shore, which costs her \$750 a month, and she has to go up 12 stairs just to get to ground level. She commented: "We can't afford to live above-ground, so we're forced to live underground in basement suites that almost kill us every day, having to go up and down the stairs."

She has a hard time understanding why there are so many new facilities for older people, such as Berwick or the Renaissance, being built when there are so many older people that could never afford to live there.

The nursing homes are all full and have wait-lists, so that's not an option for her either. She also does not want to live in the low-income housing areas because she does not feel safe. When she was living in low-income housing, she had her house broken into. She would rather live somewhere away from that kind of environment.

She is also frustrated because she needs to have her eyes tested to get new glasses, and she can't afford the testing fee. She only has enough money to cover her basic expenses and nothing extra, so she is in a bad situation right now.

The last person was a 65-year-old man who was also on CPP, old age security and guaranteed income supplement. In terms of health care, he said that when he had cancer, he was treated very well. So he doesn't have very much to say about that. He also said that his prescriptions are all covered by his health plan.

He did have a lot of concerns about housing, though. He is also concerned that the city keeps building fancy retirement homes that cost thousands of dollars a month to live in. He wonders why there aren't more nursing homes being built. Most of his friends live in basement suites or very run-down apartments and often do not have enough money for food. He also mentioned that all the low-income housing areas are full of crack shacks and are not suitable places for older people to live.

Dignity, independence, participation, fairness, security. Do any of these words apply to these stories from older adults in Kamloops? It seems clear that dignity, independence, participation, fairness and security are under threat and that government services for older adults in the interior are in drastic need of revision.

I trust this panel will take seriously the challenge put forth by older people and service providers to ensure that government services affecting older adults reflect these five principles. I've included in my written copy of this some of the recommendations from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives' recent report *From Support to Isolation: The High Cost of B.C.'s Declining Home Support Services*. I can also provide you with a copy of that report, if you'd like, for more detail.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much, doctor, for your presentation. We'll just make sure committee members get a copy of it. I'm not sure it was handed out.

If I could, maybe I'll just start things. The stories you told were based on true stories, I guess — individuals. I would encourage them, because I'm not sure that some of the issues that were faced.... The individual who had to pay for the eye test — was that the 71-year-old? They would be covered.

W. Hulko: She said she can't afford the testing fee.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): She wouldn't actually be responsible for that fee, I don't believe. There were a couple of things there. I think a good thing to do would

be, if there was ever that situation or if you're aware of it, to encourage them to speak with the local MLA, who does a great deal of work, regardless of which party, to work with the system.

The other one is SAFER, with the enhanced SAFER, which is Shelter Aid for Elderly Renters. For the other one, on \$1,100 a month as well, under Fair Pharmacare, I believe she would be all covered.

Sometimes I think it's the communication to make sure people know what is out there. But I would encourage them to talk to their local elected official, because somebody might be paying for something that they don't have to and that is covered under the social programs now.

[1240]

W. Hulko: I certainly agree with you on that — that there is an issue of lack of awareness about the services that are available.

One of the problems we have in Kamloops is that we have a shortage of social workers, who would be the ones that would fill this role. We more or less have one social worker to work with the older adult population in Kamloops, who works with Interior Health Authority and who covers Ponderosa, Overlander and the community. So we don't have the resource people there to be able to provide that information.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): A resource is the elected official's office, as well, for questions like that.

J. Kwan: You mentioned the low-income areas which the seniors don't feel safe to live in. Are these B.C. Housing projects — government housing projects, in other words? Or are they just sort of lower-rent areas in the city of Kamloops?

W. Hulko: I think it's a combination there. Some of the seniors housing complexes are located in less safe areas of town. Thrupp Manor over in the North Shore is currently trying to renovate. It serves low-income seniors, and they've had trouble trying to get any kind of government support or funding in order to do that.

There are seniors housing complexes or assisted living in safer areas in town. Perhaps on that street but maybe a couple of blocks away, it's not as safe. If we think about Bedford Manor, just over here on Seymour Street across from Desert Gardens.... Just a couple of blocks away from that, there's an area where there are injection drug users and sex trade workers. That street itself might be safe, but right around there isn't as safe.

R. Lee: There's is a very good resource book. It's called a seniors resource guide. A new edition just came out.

W. Hulko: Yeah, I know.

R. Lee: Inside that is a lot of information about seniors services. Do you find that guide useful?

W. Hulko: It's a useful guide to the services that are available. We're more concerned with the services that

aren't available or services that were available in the past and are no longer, such as the 25-percent reduction in residential care beds here. It's 29 percent, but taking into account the assisted living, it's 25 percent. We're more concerned with the services that aren't available, because I do recognize that there are some services.

I sit on the board of Seniors Outreach Services Society, which is a volunteer-run agency. It's a peer support program for seniors helping seniors. That provides a lot of the support in terms of friendly visiting or the shopping program through Safeway — programs that aren't provided by the government. One of the strengths of Kamloops is that it does have strong community spirit, people looking out for one another. But it's not enough.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Again, doctor, I want to thank you. If you could, could you leave your written submission? I'm not sure. Did you leave copies?

W. Hulko: Yes, I think I have one copy. I just came from class, so I didn't have time to make 14. Sorry.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Terrific. If there is one there, we'll look after it and make sure that members get a copy.

We are now going to move into the open-mike session of the committee's hearings. The open-mike session is set up somewhat differently. It is an opportunity for individuals. It's five minutes. There's no ability for question-and-answer, just to try and accommodate that. We do have one person signed up so far, and I will call on Charlene LaCombe.

Good afternoon, Charlene.

C. LaCombe: I was going to say that I'm an average mother, a single mom, in Kamloops, but I'm not. I'm not average by any means. Five minutes is a really, really short time.

Recommendations. Reinstate community crisis line numbers. I would say reinstate some moneys sent to the women's resource centres, the sexual assault centres.

[1245]

I'm not only a single mom of girls. I'm a foster mom in a level 3 home. I have been for 12 years. I have volunteered in many community areas, and our youth are going down the hill. I see a lot of girls going towards prostitution. I only take single, teenage girls. They're going into prostitution.

Our schools are lacking. There are not enough teachers. There is not enough funding in that area. There are not enough social workers to deal with the girls that we have in care or to help the other agencies.

Coverage for eyes? No, it does not cover that payment. You have partial payment on that, and you have to come up with the rest of it. It doesn't matter.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): For over 65?

C. LaCombe: Yes. My adopted grandpa was 82, and he still had to pay for half of it. So you can go from there. This is just recently.

The drawback in medical coverage. I recently had a youth whose medication was \$46. Guess what. She didn't get the brand name. We had to take the lower non-brand name because her medical doesn't cover it — because the B.C. government doesn't cover that, doesn't fund it anymore — so consequently, she's missing school now. She's going to fall behind. She has a learning disability. It keeps going on and on and on.

I mean, we need to have our medical coverage. We need that back as well. It's not just for the kids. You think of this young lady. Now what's going to happen to her — right? She's going to miss school, and she's going to fail this semester again because she's home and she's got multiple illnesses.

There was so much said here today that I just don't know what else to say.

Legal services. Some moneys need to be put back into that. I've seen so many situations in the last four years that have just been incredible. I'm going: okay, if they could afford a lawyer, this wouldn't be happening to these families. But they can't afford it, so they have to go represent themselves, which is unfair.

Low-income housing. Yes, we do have low-income housing for single people, families, single moms, single parents, elderly. But you know what? The new elderly place that just went up — \$2,000. That's what it's going to cost you for a senior citizen to move in there for a month. That's not your food.

There is a comic strip that was sent to me in an e-mail two years ago. It was an elderly woman who was buying cat food, and the clerk says: "You're only allowed two tins a day." Guess what. She doesn't have a cat. That's a reality in this province. Our seniors are eating cat food to survive, because it's cheaper than real food. I mean, that is a reality. I've seen this before.

Our schools. We need more money for our schools. We want our kids to go out. We don't want them to be on the streets. The one presenter said here earlier that you have the mother on the streets prostituting. Well, guess what. When her daughter turns 13, guess where she's going to be. She's going to be helping her do tricks on the street. That is a reality. That is truth, because if you look at your West End in Vancouver, that's what we've got on the North Shore here. That's our West End.

You do see people in the bushes. I don't want my kids to do that. My daughter has a learning disability. She's falling behind. If I wasn't the parent I was, she would probably be out on the street. But because I know where the resources are.... Maybe we need more education. I don't know. Okay?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Charlene, I want to thank you. Although there are no questions, I would encourage you. Five minutes is a tight time frame. The ability for us to accept written submissions as well as on-line submissions is there until the 20th of October. If you have the opportunity, I would encourage you to follow through with that, if you would like, as well. They're giving equal consideration to any oral presentation that we receive as well.

C. LaCombe: Well, I hadn't planned on talking.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): All right. Well, thank you for taking the time.

Our next presenter under the open mike is Tony Brumell.

[1250]

T. Brumell: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I am Tony Brumell, of course. I am an environmental advocate. I have talked to you.... I believe this is now my sixth or seventh attempt.

Being an environmental advocate is rather an open subject. To different individuals, "environment" means a whole bunch of different things. To a policeman, it will mean how much crime is on the street. To a health worker, it will mean how the overall health of the individual in this populace is doing. To me, of course, it means wildlife and the critters out there that have a right to life, as well, without being exploited.

They are being exploited unmercifully today by virtually every government around the world, and I just find it appalling. If this were, in fact, an open season on government policies, we'd all be here listening to me open my mouth till tomorrow at this time. It's not.

I have five minutes. I was hoping I would have more time, but that's the way it is. I would welcome questions and discussion with you outside of the committee, if you can or if you are interested, so I will hit my points quickly.

I belong to several organizations around town, most of which are the non-profit type of organizations. One of them is the Kamloops Woodworkers Guild. Another one is the Kamloops Fish and Game Club. I used to belong to the Naturalist Club, etc.

We cannot hold a 50-50 raffle in our in-house clubs anymore. It is illegal. Why is the government putting its hand heavy-handedly...? We have been threatened with prosecution if we hold a \$20 in-house 50-50 raffle. This doesn't make sense. It's unfair; it's unreasonable.

I would suggest that these raffles, these little bake sales or whatever you want.... For whatever little things that total less than \$500, I would advocate a two- or three-permit system, an A-level system whereby in-house raffles could be held without permit, without government intervention. That permit might be applied for once a year. Something of that sort — okay?

Maybe a second-level permit, a B permit, would allow a maximum raffle prize or whatever of, say, up to \$500, and it could be held outside of the house, outside of that particular organization, and offered to the public to raise funds for that organization for whatever purposes they happen to need it.

A third permit might be for something like the Dream House Lottery — something like that, where you're going over \$10,000 or \$50,000 or whatever size the prize is, something that fits the actual circumstances involved.

For us to walk in the door at one of our Fish and Game Club meetings and be told, "You will be prosecuted if you put a quarter in that jar for a raffle," is not

rational on any level as far as I'm concerned. That's my first topic. That's what I would advocate: at least a double layer of permitting for raffles to allow these organizations to raise little bits of money.

Subject 2. Every organization we've had in here this morning has had one unifying thought. I don't know if you're aware of it, but nobody — except you, Mr. Horgan — has even touched on it. Recreational drugs are what are causing the existence of most of these organizations that are here today.

Drugs exist for one reason and one reason only: they are produced or grown for money — period. Ask yourself the question: what would happen if we took the money out of the equation? Where would the drug lords go, where would the dealers go if nobody was buying their product?

Health costs, legal costs, insurance costs, policing costs — on and on and on. These costs would slowly start to disappear if we were allowed.... I realize that the political will that would be required to do this — political, legal, etc. Take the drugs that are confiscated from these drug lords and from the dealers, screen them for whatever kind of purity you need to and bloody well give them to the registered citizens or — what's the word I want? — people who live in a specific area....

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Constituents?

[1255]

T. Brumell: No. You have to live in a certain area for six months.

R. Lee: Residents.

T. Brumell: Okay. Residents — that's the word I want.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): We were all close.

T. Brumell: Sure you were.

A registered list of drug users whereby only the residents could get those drugs that have been confis-

cated from the lawbreakers. The idea, of course, is that the drug culture that we have going today is being perpetuated by the idea that somehow we have to put a prohibition on all drugs, and it's not working.

If we were allowed to, say, decriminalize the use of marijuana so that users of marijuana could grow three plants in their basement, what would happen to all of the drug suppliers out there right now who no longer had those customers because they were growing their own in little bits — small quantities?

The big producers are going to be gone after. They're going to be caught, perhaps, and maybe end up in jail. I don't know. But the idea that free drugs, that somebody could go to an Insite centre and under the harm reduction policies obtain the drug of their choice free of charge means they don't have to go and rob a bank, a car, an elderly lady on a bicycle, a home invasion or anything of the kind.

If they don't have to do the crime to get their drugs, I believe that most drug addicts will not. Over time, I think that has the propensity to be not a complete solution but perhaps one answer, one attempt at trying to mitigate or change the drug culture that we have today.

I'd love to go into this until tomorrow morning. My time is up, I'm sure.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): That is, Tony, but I want to thank you for sitting through the hearings and for taking time to present. As I indicated to the last speaker as well, if you would like to follow through with a full written submission, we have until the 20th of October that this committee accepts those. The information is on the back table, if you would like, on how to get it to us.

That concludes our public hearings here this morning in Kamloops. I want to thank all of the presenters that came out, the people that sat through to listen and bring their ideas.

With that, we stand adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 12:58 p.m.

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