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REPORT OF PROCEEDINGS
(HANSARD)

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

Prince Rupert

Thursday, October 5, 2006

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BLAIR LEKSTROM, MLA, CHAIR

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

Prince Rupert
Thursday, October 5, 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: Anne Stokes

Committee Staff: Jacqueline Quesnel (Committees Assistant)

Witnesses:

- Narguiz Ali-Zade (Merck Frosst Canada Inc.)
- Bill Belsey
- George Hayes
- Monica Lamb-Yorski (Prince Rupert Community Arts Council)
- Pat Lauson (Merck Frosst Canada Inc.)
- Conrad Lewis (United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union)
- Des Nobels (Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District)
- Maatje Piket (DesignLink Strategic Resources)
- Katherine Stewart (United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union)
- Joy Thorkelson (United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union)
- Praveen Vohora (Vohora and Co.)

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MINUTES

SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES



Thursday, October 5, 2006
4:00 p.m.
British Columbia Room, Crest Hotel
222 West First Avenue, Prince Rupert

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

1. The Chair called the Committee to order at 4:02 p.m.
2. Opening statements by Mr. Blair Lekstrom, MLA, Chair.
3. The following witnesses appeared before the Committee and answered questions:
 - 1) George Hayes
 - 2) Vohora & Company
 - 3) Merck Frosst Canada Ltd.
 - 4) Bill Belsey
 - 5) United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union — CAW
 - 6) Prince Rupert Community Arts Council
 - 7) Skeena-Queen Charlotte Regional District (Electoral Area 'A')
 - 8) DesignLink Strategic Resources
4. The Committee recessed from 6:07 p.m. to 6:32 p.m.
5. The Committee adjourned at 6:33 p.m. to the call of the Chair.

Blair Lekstrom, MLA
Chair

Anne Stokes
Committee Clerk

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 5, 2006

The committee met at 4:02 p.m.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Good afternoon, everyone. I'd like to welcome you to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services public hearings. My name is Blair Lekstrom. I'm the MLA for Peace River South, and I have the honour of being the Chair of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

We are here today to hear from British Columbians about what their priorities are in the upcoming budget for British Columbia and what people would like to see, if the possibility is to expand expenditures — ideas, if you have, on where you would alter spending, as well, within the province.

We have concluded, I believe, ten hearings to date. We are scheduled to hold 14 public hearings throughout the province, in every region. As well as the public hearing process, we receive on-line submissions, either written submissions or people have gone on line to fill out the on-line questionnaire attached with the prebudget consultation paper that was mailed to every household in British Columbia. They've been going very well. We have heard a wide array of issues around our province so far.

Our committee is mandated by legislation to tour the province, as I have indicated. The Hon. Carole Taylor, our Minister of Finance in British Columbia, has to submit a prebudget consultation paper no later than the 15th of September, which she did, and present it to our committee and to British Columbians. We are then tasked to go out, speak to British Columbians and put forward a report to the Legislative Assembly no later than the 15th of November.

Our meeting format this afternoon for the presenters is a 15-minute time frame — ten minutes for the presentation and five minutes for questions and answers from the committee. Many times that's a very short time frame. If the ten minutes doesn't allow you much and you need to use the 15, all that is, is that we wouldn't have time to dialogue as far as questions at that time. But the key issue for our committee and our main mandate is to listen to British Columbians and then accumulate that information.

Before we start this afternoon's hearings, I'm going to ask the members of our committee to introduce themselves, and then we will call our first presenter.

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

H. Bloy: Harry Bloy, MLA for Burquitlam.

B. Simpson: Bob Simpson, MLA for Cariboo North.

D. Hayer: Dave Hayer, MLA for Surrey-Tynehead.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): Bruce Ralston, MLA for Surrey-Whalley and Deputy Chair of the committee.

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

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

R. Hawes: Randy Hawes, MLA for Maple Ridge-Mission.

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

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Also joining us with the committee this afternoon are Anne Stokes, on my immediate left, who is our Committee Clerk, as well as Jacqueline Quesnel, at the back, who you went by at the information table with all of the paper.

As well, each of our hearings is recorded and transcribed by Hansard Services as well as broadcast live on the Internet. Joining us are Wendy Collisson and Graham Caverhill, who are to my far right.

With that, I am going to begin the hearings this afternoon and call our first presenter. I will call on Mr. George Hayes. Good afternoon. Welcome to the committee.

[1605]

Presentations

G. Hayes: Thank you, and welcome to Prince Rupert. My name is George Hayes. I'm a retired engineer who has lived in Prince Rupert for 20 years. For the last seven or eight years I've worked on a whole range of projects that I think offer an opportunity to British Columbians and the economy of British Columbia to develop opportunities.

I've prepared a rather quick brief here on a strategic vision to expand the economy of the northwest, create jobs and establish an environment for both private and public investment, which, in turn, would provide ideal conditions for an integrated partnership with first nations and non-first nations. We must realize that 50 percent of the population of Prince Rupert is first nations, as well as Terrace and the whole area. There are some problems, I think, that must be addressed in budget strategies and planning.

It is suggested that the committee give close scrutiny to the six project proposals in this brief. I've provided you with all the background documentation.

The first one is the Prince Rupert pulp mill. This is an asset that is estimated at a value of about \$1 billion. If the China government were to replace it in China, it would be about \$4 billion.

We have a location on the waterfront. We also have access by rail to a devastation of the pine beetle, and there's a major basket of fibre that's available as well. Having sat on the committee for the land planning for about four years, we have to maintain a forest industry on the north coast and on the coast generally. We can't give up on that one that easily.

The mill is state of the art. I've spent 20 years in the pulp and paper industry here and back east — Tembec and Domtar. I'm familiar with this industry. There have been, very recently, some changes in the whole world of pulp and particularly northern fibre kraft pulp. Where in Japan they recycle roughly three times, you have to add some long fibre to maintain the strength of the sheet, so there is a market. The market will hold probably for, I would think, about five years at minimum. In that time, hopefully, a bit more innovation and we could definitely very quickly become the low-cost producer in North America.

The container port offers an alternative for a market situation. Traditionally, the mill used to sell a large percentage of its product to Japan, who warehoused and distributed it. There are a lot of small mills in China. Containers are the way to go, whether it's making cigarette paper or whatever it might be. It might be two containers a week. So there's a different market.

[1610]

I mention these market focuses. Last year after New Skeena went into a tailspin, a group of us here in Prince Rupert.... We also prevailed upon some people with the IWA Steelworkers to look at the process. Moe Thibault, who was point person for the restructuring of Algoma Steel, is presently writing a book on some of the management issues.

We've put together a business plan. I am convinced that we can be a very, very competitive mill for a variety of reasons, but one of the things we have to do is address the issue of management. It's not the same way that we did it before. We've focused on the Deming method — and there's a lot of work that's been done — along with a very key person in this equation who was involved in about 40-some-odd restructurings from a financial-banker perspective. It's doable.

The second project that I want to mention.... We have worked over the last six years developing an aqua-food project. This is taking protein from the Prairies, and you'll have the documentation on it. There are about ten sources of protein — canola residues, soy residues, pea protein, etc. — from the Ontario border to Prince Rupert. We have a railhead. This is after you've extracted the oils from canola, say. We also developed, at the B.C. research centre, a process for processing waste fish products — the guts and all the rest of it — in a 30-second cooking process so that you don't lose the vitamins and so on. This is a component for flavourants so that shrimp, salmon, whatever it might be, will not spit it out. That documentation is there. We've done all the test work.

We have developed a program on the processing of fish waste. We ran a system down at McMillan Fisheries for a year, processing waste products, where we retained the quality of that component — the vitamins and so on. The hydrolysate can be kept and stored for quite a long time and then blended with whatever. If it's for carp, it's one thing, maybe; for salmon, it's something else; for shrimp, it's something else; and so on.

We do have a grain terminal. Surprisingly enough, if the mill were to go, there is roughly a million pounds

of energy that would just go up the stack — now it's 172 degrees. A number of mills — Harmac, Domtar — had a Rosenblatt system, where you can drop the temperature to 70 degrees and even improve the environment side of it. Put \$5 with a thousand pounds. You're talking about a \$5,000-an-hour benefit that could go either to the mill or for the drying. It's tough because the oils have to be vacuum-packed and containerized; the oils may go rancid in warm climates.

That whole package is in your hands to look at. It's an opportunity to develop roughly 2,000 tonnes a day. The market is growing at more than 10 percent. The anchovies from South America used for fish meal have capped; it's in fact going down. Especially with another El Niño coming, it may even drop further. So this is available as a market with growth. As economies such as China's grow, there's a higher demand for protein; it's needed. There's a growing market. The market study should probably be updated, but there are also all of the breakdowns in your file.

[1615]

The next area, which has disturbed me for a long time, is the aquaculture. I was co-chairing the northern transportation task force a few years ago. We sat down with the salmon farmers. They think that we could probably create 5,000 jobs on the north coast. However, there have been some environmental issues raised about salmon farming, and the thing has been stopped.

What we are proposing — we've done some work with the UBC engineering group, and you'll see a few pictures and so on — is to develop a totally enclosed pen that can be located near the villages, and people can be at home. We are confident that we can get a better return than the open-pen system and, at the same time, meet all of the concerns that I have heard to date on environmental concerns.

The most recent one was a couple of days ago. They were talking about the issue of carotene colouring giving the pink effect to salmon. Well, we even looked into that, and we found a source of shells in Newfoundland where a tenth of 1 percent would probably be adequate to give that same effect. It's a natural product. We went through the process. That is important.

What I'm suggesting here is that we would use tide and wave energy for that pen. We need a pilot project — Queen Charlottes where there are good conditions. They need employment. I would say there or Kitkatla, one of the communities, would be where we might want to launch that pilot project.

I also include a little package of some notes that the city has asked me to look at — first of all, the regional district — to replace the fossil fuel generators on the Charlottes. Wave energy, tidal energy and wind energy can be put into a green package. We had seven graduate students at UBC working on the wave energy file this summer. We got some very good results. Again, this is a doable thing. We're going to have an excess of power, because when the wind is running fairly high, you have to tie down the windmills. But that extra power could be used for an aquaculture program.

There are four sites just in Prince Rupert that have a natural foundation. Anything over about \$17 a barrel for oil with the substation and the existing hydro to back it up can be developed. Just ballparking, depending on how we engineer it, we're talking probably about 70 megawatts. Every megawatt can be put into the power system because of hydro.

This has a real future for this community, as far as I'm concerned, for a number of reasons. If we're a little bit imaginative, we could set up something like CityTel in partnership with, probably, first nations and the city and community. This is doable. It is environmentally....

[1620]

My own background as an engineer is that I was director of engineering with Dominion Bridge-Sulzer when we built the Annapolis Royal tidal power system a number of years ago. The only problem they've had was that a whale got in behind that, and they had a hell of a job to get him out. CBC gave it probably more publicity at that time than it had in the previous 20 years.

This is doable. It's an easy one to rationalize, particularly with the framework agreement that the Minister of Energy established a few weeks ago. This type of thing is doable.

I also want to talk a little bit about another subject, and that is health. A number of years ago I worked with UBC medical faculty, and we found Dr. Hollenberg, who is the former dean — retired — at that time who became a champion for a project that I think is doable. We looked at a demonstration project that we would locate in one of the villages — Lax Kw'alaams was what we were talking about — where you engage the elders.

There's a leadership built around the all-native basketball. These are young people that are enthusiastic and strong. Bring this together where they sit, and you'll see in that file that the possibility of dealing with.... We've listed ten subjects — it might be suicide, it might be diabetes, it might be anything — where there's a local support mechanism. This was designed with the idea that in can be cookie-cuttered from Lax Kw'alaams to another first nations village or to a non-first nations community. It has tremendous potential for a ground-up addressing of the health costs growth.

The last item I'm putting on here: I've done a lot of work with a lot of people in first nations and non-first nations on a North Pacific art festival. This summer the archaeology results came out showing that people were living on Dundas Island. It's unfortunate that the art collection that Dundas collected in a couple of weeks travelling down the coast here is up for auction today. Carbon-dating showed that people were living here more than 7,000 years ago.

The cultural connections with Asia are clear, and if anyone watched the closing of the Olympics in Japan, you would have seen the drumming, the dancing. They have totem poles, button blankets, etc., as part of their heritage. I've talked to people from those countries. They are enthusiastic and positive about this and are focusing it around the river cultures, which is really where people were living for a long time.

I think we should do it in a very professional way. I've spoken to Cirque du Soleil, who have roots in China, Japan, Russia, etc. In the United States, Las Vegas used them for staging many events. They would be very interested in participating. This is not a proposal to sort of have fun here for a few weeks. It could be very, very showcase for a culture that exists on the north coast of British Columbia and be tied in for long-term future relationships with the North Pacific nations.

[1625]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, George, you've put a lot of information into a short period of time, and I do want to thank you. I can assure you that the members will review your full presentation, as you've submitted it to our committee. Thank you for taking time out of your day to bring your ideas forward, and together the whole idea is to try and build a better province.

All right, we don't have enough time for questions. That's why I was kind of wrapping it up, but....

G. Hayes: I know you were signalling me. But I think that those seven items.... You can read about them and follow up.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): You bet. I appreciate your time.

Just before we call our next presenter, I do want to recognize a former colleague from the Legislative Assembly. Bill Belsey is in the audience with his wife Lonie.

Good afternoon, and welcome.

Our next presentation this afternoon is from Vohora and Co., and joining us is Praveen Vohora.

Good afternoon. How are you?

P. Vohora: Good afternoon. Thank you. I'll try and stay brief this time so we can have questions.

My name is Praveen Vohora. I'm a chartered accountant with the firm of Vohora and Co. in Prince Rupert. I've actually been here almost 30 years now. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with my thoughts and recommendations for the 2007 provincial budget.

As you know, the B.C. economy has improved in recent years, although it takes time for the benefits to flow to all the regions. That's what we're looking forward to — seeing the benefits flow to our area of the province.

As you are also aware, Prince Rupert's economy has struggled in the past decade, but fortunately, there is optimism for the future. I would like to talk about two areas: first, the need for strategic investments in infrastructure and, second, the need to improve the province's competitiveness.

Dealing with the infrastructure. Thankfully, we are now seeing strong infrastructure investments in Prince Rupert, such as the first phase of the container terminal expansion, which should help provide long-term economic growth to the northwest. Through federal and provincial investments in infrastructure, Prince Rupert has an incredible opportunity to take advantage of our strategic location to be a northern hub for both trade and tourism. In particular, with our proximity to

China, the Port of Prince Rupert is strategically located to be a major gateway to the Asia-Pacific.

Not only would the economic revival of Prince Rupert benefit the northwest immensely, it would also benefit the entire province. Prince Rupert is a major component of the gateway strategy for increasing trade with Asia-Pacific. Through infrastructure investments, our trade capacity is strengthened for the entire province. After all, while British Columbians look at the province regionally, international markets look at B.C. as a whole.

Therefore, my first recommendation for the committee is that infrastructure investments across the province need to remain a priority for the government. Instead of adding to the congestions in the lower mainland, it makes more sense to invest in the northwest. A population that is more spread out across the province can only help in the delivery of services such as health and education.

However, infrastructure investments are not without their challenges in Prince Rupert and the province. Due to the uncertainty around first nation treaty claims, infrastructure projects can get tied down or abandoned. Although this is a federal issue, it still stands to B.C.'s benefit to promote settlements and also urge the federal government to deal with this issue.

The container project is progressing, but at the same time, there is ongoing litigation that may or may not halt this project. The cost of work stoppage and negotiation is huge, and some businesses are discouraged to invest because of the unsettled claims. It is imperative that a process is developed jointly between the province and the federal government that is clearly defined and treaties are negotiated in good time so that we can continue to move forward.

[1630]

Moving on to my second part on competitiveness. I would also like to talk about competitiveness. I agree with the recent report of the B.C. Competition Council that government needs to enhance the friendliness of British Columbia's business climate to welcome investment through competitive corporate and personal taxation, regulatory policy and support for innovation. In this regard, the province has done a very good job of keeping our personal and business tax rates competitive.

I agree with the Competition Council report that we should ensure that our corporate income tax rate does not get too far ahead of Alberta's tax rate. While it is not realistic to compete with Alberta's rate overall, considering the high oil and gas revenues, we need to be cognizant of the competitive pressures that Alberta poses for our human and financial capital.

My final point is around PST administration. As you may know, we have a large first nations population in our area. Therefore, merchants continually have to grapple with PST and whether the goods are taxable if received on a reserve. Merchants should have a simple declaration form signed by the purchaser, and the onus of policing whether the goods were delivered to a fishboat or transported on their vehicle to a reserve should be removed from the merchant.

Most of the large-goods retailers, such as automobile and furniture stores, have not been assessed by the

departments, because the purchaser could not be contacted to confirm that the goods were transported or received on a reserve. It is unfair to the agent of the Crown that they end up having to pay the tax on the penalties. We have been promised by various visiting politicians that this problem will be dealt with. However, nothing has been done to date. We would like to see the budget issue clear guidelines and removal of the policing onus from the merchant.

Thank you for this opportunity to present to you today.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you, Praveen, for coming out from what I'm sure is a busy schedule. I'm going to look to members of the committee to see if they have any questions.

J. Horgan: I'm wondering if you could help educate me on your last point with respect to the PST and administration, particularly as it relates to on-reserve and off-reserve. It's obviously very familiar to you. It's new to me, so if you could expand on what you want to achieve there and how this committee can help you get there.

P. Vohora: Just to give you a scenario. If you take an automobile dealer.... Right now when he sells a car, he's required to collect PST. What happens is that just nearby there is reserve land. As long as the transfer documents are signed on reserve land, it's not subject to PST when the car is being transferred. So the merchant actually gets a declaration saying that this is all done on reserve land. Then when the auditor comes along, that's not accepted. That's not good enough — right? What happens now is that the merchant will actually take a camera along. They'll take a photograph in that area just to provide evidence that the car actually got transferred on reserve land.

Another scenario would be a person who lives on a reserve and comes into town and buys furniture. He's going to transfer those goods over to his fishboat. They receive delivery. The furniture retailer will actually drive his truck over there and deliver the goods to the fishboat. Now, what happens is that the PST auditor comes along and looks at it and says: "Where is the evidence that these goods were actually moved to a reserve?" And there is nothing. There is the company's truck that delivered it to the fishboat.

The auditors do try to contact the person who bought the goods, but these audits are done over a period of six years. They'll look at it and say: "Well, I can't contact that person anymore, so that means I'm not going to allow it as being exempt from PST." They'll do a proration. One of my clients had to pay \$21,000 in PST because of that problem. There were no arguments we could use because we had these invoices, but they don't accept it. I don't know if I answered you.

J. Horgan: So a reversal on this, perhaps?

[1635]

P. Vohora: You know, when you take a minor child.... When you go to a store, like in Vancouver, to

buy clothing, they'll pull out a receipt and make you sign that. That's good enough. I'm sure the PST auditors are not going back and checking to see if that person was actually under that age, but somehow here it is a higher standard. That's part of the problem.

D. Hayer: I have the same question. A very good presentation you have made. Would it be possible that they fill out a form that has the social insurance number and driver's licence or some other identification so that they can verify where the person lives? They can even phone him — right? Because once you have more information, just the name and address.... Is that what you're trying to suggest in this case?

P. Vohora: That's right. In fact, in the scenarios like the furniture retailer — my client — we had photocopies of their status card. It said that the person lived on the reserve at the time they bought that. It was all attached. They signed the invoice, but that was still not good enough.

I agree. There is a requirement. When you're a commercial fisherman there's a requirement. There's an exemption from PST. There's a rubber stamp. They sign and put a commercial fishing licence number, and that's good enough for the PST auditor. But in this delivery issue.... Yes, there is some abuse, because the reserve lands are so close. That's the issue. But is it up to the merchant to ensure that these goods are going to the reserve or not? I think that's really the point I'm trying to make.

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): My question has been answered.

I. Black: Thank you for the presentation, Praveen. I've decided that everyone named Praveen is a chartered accountant. I know three Praveens, and you're all chartered accountants.

I am curious about the comments on the Gateway project. I am assuming that your accounting firm deals with a lot of business clients and whatnot. I'm from the lower mainland; many of us here are. The Gateway program, as you may know, is part of about \$100 billion worth of capital projects on the books at the moment.

We can debate down in the lower mainland about the importance of one versus the other, but you touched on something I'd like you to expand on, if you could. From your own perspective — and through you, your clients' perspectives — you've identified the Gateway project as very important to this area. Could you expand on that a little bit and explain what it means in more granular terms and very personal terms to some of the business clients and, by association their employees, to this area?

P. Vohora: If you consider a lot of the resources, like in logging and so on.... If you were to manufacture any goods right now in this area, in the northwest, you would have to transport them all the way down to Vancouver. Then it would go in a container, because that's where it's going — to Asia.

The cost of that transportation is just.... We won't grow these manufacturing plants. We won't grow any of these things in this area if those things are not available. The minute we have a container port announcement, immediately there are people jockeying for positions to make sure that their goods are going to be delivered here, because there is difficulty in getting goods off in Vancouver.

So I think this container port will add to the wealth of the province as a whole. It won't take away any work from Vancouver, I don't believe. In fact, it will help this area grow.

I got my chartered accountancy in England. Thirty years ago when I first came to Canada, one of the first things I noticed was how all of Canada is concentrated along the border, and all of the north is being wasted. Then you hear about all the health care problems. You hear about all the education problems, because what you have is a large population base that.... The health care facilities in the lower mainland are being over-utilized, but you've still got to provide a hospital in a community like Prince Rupert.

What happens is that these are underutilized. If you could shift the population all across so that it is more homogeneous.... Guess what. You've solved your health care problem. You've solved your education problem. How many dollars did you spend?

J. Kwan: My question has been answered. It was around the PST issues.

R. Lee: I just wanted to see.... In your opinion, secondary industry can be established in this area because we have a lot of resource exports.

P. Vohora: That's right. I can see communities down the road from here all the way to Prince George having a lot of secondary industry. There is a lot of land and a lot of facilities available.

[1640]

Right now I think the only negative feature would be skilled labour. I don't think we have sufficient people here to fill some of these jobs that are going to be created. So that's the challenge. That challenge is all around B.C. I don't think it's just limited to us. I can see a lot of growth here in this area.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Praveen, I want to thank you for coming out to put your ideas forward to our committee here this afternoon.

Our next presentation this afternoon is from Merck Frosst Canada. Joining us are Narguiz Ali-Zade and Pat Lauson. Good afternoon and welcome.

P. Lauson: First of all, thank you for giving us the opportunity to present to this very important committee. My name is Pat Lauson. I'm the manager of policy for Merck Frosst, and Narguiz Ali-Zade is the manager of public health for Merck Frosst.

Narguiz is trained as a pediatrician and has a master's degree in public health policy from Emory Uni-

versity, which is one of the premier public health schools in North America. Narguiz is going to present on two new exciting vaccines that will have a significant impact on the health care resources and on the health and well-being of the citizens of our province.

N. Ali-Zade: Thank you very much for providing us with this opportunity to present our case to you. Before proceeding with any particular vaccines, I would like to give you a little bit of background about the values of vaccines and immunization in the first place so that you can put into context what we're talking about and what it means to the economy.

As is well known, except probably for safe drinking water, vaccines are by far the most cost-beneficial intervention. This is one of the medical interventions that has a major impact on human lives and survival and the economy in general. Time and time again, vaccines show to be one of the most cost-effective public health interventions. In B.C. we are one of the jurisdictions in the world that provides the widest coverage of publicly covered vaccines.

The more successful they are, the more chance that they are losing attention, because they do their work well, and they become victims of their own success. Once you have a certain communicable disease almost eradicated, the perception of the public — and sometimes of the decision-makers, the policy-makers — tends to be in the direction of: why should I continue investing? Why is it important?

It is important because once you see the value of vaccination.... Once the coverage rates fall for the publicly funded immunization programs, those nasty and devastating communicable diseases resurge. We just had an example of that in southern Ontario where we had the rubella outbreak, and it created a major productivity loss in schools, workplaces and the overall community.

With that, I would like to present to you a case of why it is important to invest in public health, in vaccinations in general and in these two particular disease areas that we'll be talking about. The first one is cervical cancer. I pause here because it's such an important and terrible disease. It's the second most common cancer in women aged 22 to 44 — the most productive age. It's also second after breast cancer. I know it's Breast Cancer Awareness Month now, and you probably heard about the Vancouver event.

[1645]

What is cervical cancer? Maybe just a little bit of background information. It's caused by a virus that is called human papilloma virus, or HPV. I will be referring to it as HPV. HPV causes multiple cancers. It's 99.7 percent linked — and it's unprecedented — to cervical cancer. It's about 50 percent linked to vaginal and vulvar cancer, and also causes genital warts and many other devastating diseases.

In B.C. every year we spend \$50 million managing the area of those HPV-related diseases. We perform 600,000 Pap smear tests. Pap smear tests are the secondary preventative measure when you go and test whether a woman has had any infection or has an on-

going infection. This is not a rare case. Some 75 percent of Canadian women — and it's true universally across Canada — would have had at least one HPV infection in her lifetime.

Regardless of how much we're investing in secondary prevention, we still end up having about 150 women every year in B.C. diagnosed with cervical cancer and another 160 with other cancers due to HPV and.... We have about 60 people who die of cervical and other cancers.

In terms of why it's important for the economy, I think it's really an appealing story. It's a major research utilization of health care system. It's a major impact on the productivity. It's a major impact on the families.

You're probably asking yourself why we're presenting this here. It's not accidental. We were asked by the medical community to come up to the north and present it because the incidence of cervical cancer is six to ten times more prevalent in aboriginal populations. It also has very much higher rates in women of Asian descent, because they don't feel comfortable going to a male physician and taking a Pap smear test. It's also common in northern communities, in general, due to the access. That's one of the probable questions that was hovering in your mind — why these guys are here.

B.C. has been a leader in cancer prevention. It was the first jurisdiction that introduced the Pap smear test in the sixties. Since then we've achieved quite a bit. We had about an 80-percent reduction in the first few decades. But if you look at the trend in the last 15 years or so, there is no major improvement as far as the incidence of the disease and death rates are concerned. It's just by nature the deficiency of the secondary prevention. You just detect the disease when it already is happening or has progressed to a major outcome such as a precancerous condition or cancer. That's why a vaccination by default is the best intervention, because you do it before it actually hits you.

It's also important that vaccination has a major benefit as far as access is concerned. In B.C. we have about 72-percent participation in an annual program, but we know certain groups do not actively participate. Vaccination is a much easier means to delivering the best medicine in the most cost-effective way.

What is the solution, really? We're here to present a vaccine that our company has worked on for 18 years. It's really a major breakthrough. It's not only exciting for us. It's exciting for a number of different medical societies, communities — the way we announced the vaccine arrived in Canada, which was in July of this year. We had a number of agencies, such as the cancer society, coming out and saying: "It's the best intervention in the last 60 years that would help change women's health."

We had — you probably know him very well, the CEO of the B.C. Cancer Agency and also the inaugural chair of the Canadian cancer coalition — Dr. Simon Sutcliffe. He said: "It's not a question of if we should vaccinate. It's a question of when and how. The issues are not medicine or science. They're practical, logical and ethical issues about population health."

[1650]

Then the question becomes: what are those questions, and what is the most optimal intervention? As

Pat said, I've been trained in health policy and management, so to me, it's really very evident that the best intervention is a school-based vaccination program.

Why is it so? Because you have a captive audience, and you have an already established infrastructure. No major incremental investments are needed there, because there are already a number of publicly funded programs going on there. You have a captive audience, and most importantly, you are introducing immunization at an age before females become sexually active. That's the idea. So you get the most benefit for your investment.

With this information, I would like to ask this committee to consider public vaccination and providing funding for a school-based HPV vaccination program that would help protect B.C. females — young females. I know many of you have daughters, and you probably have wives and mothers. This is something of very substantial benefit to women's health.

The second case that I want to make is about children. It's about a devastating disease that affects virtually — I have to be careful — over 95 percent of every child under the age of five. This is a very omnipotent disease. This is a gastroenteritis that creates major dehydration.

It's a disease that not only creates a lot of direct burden on the family and on the child; it's also a disease that sucks a lot of resources out of the medical system. You will see for yourself. It's measured in thousands. It's unbelievable. If you think about that every single child goes through it, and there are multiple types of that virus, every child usually would go through many such infections.

Again, it's measured in thousands. We have 7,000 hospitalizations in Canada annually. We have 27,000 emergency visits, and this a seasonal disease. It hits exactly the same or about the same time when flu hits ERs. So you get ERs jammed with elderly people with flu, and you have all the kids that are spreading that very hardy virus across ERs. You had 56,000 physician visits. If you're roughly calculating what it means, you can see what a major impact....

Again, as far as the medical resources are concerned, there was also a major impact on productivity. For the families of the 50 percent of Canadian children that had rotavirus, one parent at least had to leave three days of work. Being a mother myself, my first question was.... Now having a federal program, we know that mothers are at home. Still, about 56 percent of fathers had to miss days of work. For those unfortunate ones who develop more advanced cases and get hospitalized, a parent would miss five days of work.

This all translates into a \$46 million annual demand on our society, our economy — \$17 million of which goes into direct medical resource utilization. I hope I made a case in terms of the burden on the economy and on the health care system, particularly with the ER use.

We do have a vaccine. This is by far our broadest vaccine. It covers so many multiple types. I don't want to take too much of your time. It's really evident that it's a very great disease. It reduces hospitalization by 96 percent, ER visits by 94 percent, and you can read the rest for yourself. The major impact I would like to

draw your attention to is 87-percent improvement in productivity.

[1655]

I'll pause and ask you to consider an infant vaccination. It's an oral vaccine, and easy to administer. Again, the infrastructure is there. It's the one that's going to help prevent those severe consequences in children and the outcome on our society.

In conclusion, going back to the general values of vaccines, I would like to ask your attention not only to look at those two vaccines in particular but to look at public health in general and at immunization programs.

At the throne speech it was said that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Dr. Kendall, the public health officer, joked at the Canadian Public Health Association meeting in Vancouver: "It means that we should be entitled to 1/16 of the health care resources." But we know it's way, way below that mark.

I do urge you to look at these vaccination programs not as an expense but as an investment that will have a major payback in improvement in human lives, in the elevation of resources from those needy health care resources, and it will improve productivity of our societies and our communities here in B.C.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much for presenting to our committee and for coming to the north, as you indicated. Certainly we are one province, and we try to grow together and work together.

We do have time for one quick question. I'll go to Jenny on that, and we'll try and squeeze in another if we can.

J. Kwan: I'm curious about these vaccines. For both these vaccines, is it administered once a year — annually — or is it administered once every so many years? Then the numbers that you have for the infant component — do you have the numbers in terms of the breakdown of reducing health care costs and so on for B.C., not the Canada-wide numbers?

N. Ali-Zade: I'll take the first question. In terms of the immunization, the first one comes as an injection. The second one is an oral vaccine, so it's three squishes of that nice....

J. Kwan: But you take it once.

N. Ali-Zade: You do it once in the same way you do any other childhood immunization. It's synchronized — two months, four months, six months, and you're done.

It's the same with the school-based program. Now we have hepatitis B program with three shots. You do it at the same time you do the hepatitis — at day 1, two months down the road, six months down the road, and you're done. That's why it's important to have it at school because you can give them all at school and finish the series.

About your second question, on the Gardasil side, actually B.C. is a Klondike of research. We've been do-

ing a lot of research with B.C. HPV and B.C. Cancer Agency looking at your databases, so we do have a lot of things that are coming out. Some of them have just been presented, so we might have a lot of B.C.-related data on HPV on the effectiveness and cost-benefit of it.

On the rotavirus side, unfortunately at this point we only have Quebec and Ontario data, but it's sufficient because it's the same data. It's just how much more you want to invest to get the same information. That's the question.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): One final quick question.

R. Hawes: You sort of asked the question I was going to ask, so I'm going to change it because you talked about the value of immunization as a whole.

In British Columbia pharmacists are not allowed to administer any kind of immunization. Alberta is moving towards allowing pharmacists to do that. In New Orleans when the hurricane hit, vaccinations were given widely but not by doctors or nurses, rather by pharmacists. They were the only people who were free to do that.

Would you recommend that we look at moving to allow pharmacists here to engage in immunization?

P. Lauson: I know that the B.C. College of Pharmacists is looking at expanding the scopes of practice. Being able to make injections is one of the approaches they're looking at. Any way that would broaden strategy around increasing effectiveness of immunization programs would be supported by us.

[1700]

N. Ali-Zade: We currently do work very closely with pharmacists because pharmacists are one of the front-liners, and they do provide a lot of education to parents. They are the ones who actually deliver the coaching, manage the vaccines.

So in terms of access, that could be a good access. The question is how you want to regulate it. It needs a lot of training, so it's not up to us to decide it, but it definitely will improve access, I would guess.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): I want to thank you both very much for coming out and presenting to the committee this afternoon.

For our next presentation this afternoon I will call on Bill Belsey. Good afternoon, Bill. How are you?

B. Belsey: I'm well.

Welcome once again to Prince Rupert. It's becoming a bit of a tradition, I think, that the Finance Committee travels to Prince Rupert, listens to the concerns of Prince Rupertites. It's a pleasure to be on this side of the table for once.

For those that are maybe new to the committee, I'm sure if you look back at some of the reports that have been put in place, I think the first time the committee was here, at least that I participated in, was about 2002. We took some time and travelled around Prince Rupert

and spent a bit of time looking at a number of businesses that were closed, a number of industries that were closed.

I think the second time you came back, we travelled around, and there wasn't much change. But I think if you travelled today, you might see a difference. The community is starting to come back.

We have a container port that's being built. We have a cruise ship terminal that's servicing the cruise ship industry in the summer months. We have a college that is attracting students from across the north and from first nations communities. So these are all some of the positive things that we have seen in the last five or six years, and they're very appreciated.

The only way you get those kinds of things, the only way you afford those kinds of things is certainly with support from government, and this community has had considerable support. I thank you for that.

I also want to thank you for the work you do, the job you do. You don't hear that enough. I know that. I know the time that you put in. I know the time you spend away from families, away from loved ones, and the work you do really isn't appreciated as much — or at least it is appreciated, but it's not spoken about enough. I just want to thank each and every one of you for the work you do.

I want to tell you that I think you need to stay the course. We need to stay the course in this province. One of the greatest things that we can do to provide us with the funding that you're going to hear people request from you or to consider in budgeting is pay down our debt.

From the flyer that was put out this year that has gone to every household in the province, 7 percent of our budget goes to debt. When we can pay that down, those are dollars that are available to the citizens of British Columbia. They're almost unfound dollars in that we're not paying those dollars to offshore banks. Those dollars remain in the province, available for us to spend, and not just this year, but they're there next year and years to come.

I think it's very important that we consider paying down the debt and making those dollars available.

Another area that is mentioned in the brochure that was made available is percentages of where budgeted amounts will go to the various ministries. In a conversation I had the other day with a couple of folks, when we talked about some of these issues, was the idea that maybe, just maybe, if we dealt with percentages for ministries instead of budget dollars....

[1705]

Let me explain. The province collects so much money every year, and then we allocate amounts of that money to the various ministries. What if we were to say that 40 percent of whatever we collect at the end of the year goes to health care? Maybe 20 percent, 25 percent goes to education — or maybe the numbers we're currently using today. It doesn't really matter. But every year we know the percentages, and every year we can't commit more than what we get. So we still live within our budget. We're still meeting percentages for ministries.

Maybe there's some encouragement there to increase the revenue coming into the province. Not necessarily through taxes — I think that would be a poor choice. But I think there are other sources of revenue that we can have — certainly, stability within the province. We could gain or accept more investors, greater budgets, and that would allow us.... Those percentages we allocate to the various ministries would be larger — in total amounts, not in percentages.

I'd just like to thank you for taking the time to come here. We heard you were coming, so that's why the sun was out today. We had it out yesterday, too, for the Finance Minister. I don't know how long we'll keep it. But anyway, thank you very much. I appreciate everything you do. Take care; have a safe trip.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): All right. Well, thank you very much, Bill. I'll look to members of the committee and see if they have any questions.

D. Hayer: Thank you very much, Bill. I appreciate you coming and presenting. You know, when you were the MLA there.... I know that the Premier has spoken about Prince Rupert in his speeches. Earlier today we met with your mayor, Herb Pond, and we took a tour on the street and talked to some of the people. They seemed to be saying that over the five years they definitely have seen change — more jobs available. Herb was saying that there is probably one job per day created here — how he looked at it.

We visited one of the colleges here the last time we were here. How is that college doing? They were opening up. They were still under construction then.

B. Belsey: The college is doing well. I mean, there are still always challenges with education and funding the programs they would like to put in. Putting people in seats is somewhat of a challenge. But you know, they've got some great programs there. They have trade programs now. They have funding that's coming in from partnering up with industries in town that are contributing to the trades programs.

It's a huge boost to this community, and it helps to make a community, to build a community, to keep people here and to build hope for the community.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Bill, I want to thank you for taking the time to come forward. It's our job to go out and listen to British Columbians and, at the end, try and put all of the information we gather together and put a report forward to the Legislative Assembly. I appreciate you taking the time.

Our next presentation is brought to us by the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union, CAW. Joining us are Joy Thorkelson, Conrad Lewis and Katherine Stewart. Good afternoon, welcome.

J. Thorkelson: My name is Joy Thorkelson, and I'm the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union's northern representative. I have with me today two shoreworkers, Katherine Stewart and Conrad Lewis.

Shoreworkers are people who work in fish plants. They're called shoreworkers because they work on-shore, as opposed to fishermen or tendermen.

[1710]

We have four issues we would like to raise. The reason we are here is because, despite what you may have heard on the street about our employment having improved, our unemployment is still well into the double digits during the wintertime, and we probably still have unemployment rates of around 14 percent. The building trades are not yet fully employed in town even though we do have construction going on at the port. That has impacted our community, particularly the availability of work in the wintertime.

Shoreworkers for many years have struggled to get off-season work. We usually have lots of work in the salmon season, and then off-season work has been the problem. As a result of that, we have changed our collective agreement and brought more work into our plants in the wintertime by working with the companies, making wage concessions and then having productivity bonuses in order to bring work into our plants.

This year, in response to the union's and company's cooperation efforts, our Massett plant brought in, I think, four new machines in order to process more fish during the summer and the winter. Our ocean fish plant brought in a number of new machines as well, and our Canadian Fish Plant, which is the largest cannery in North America, brought in a third skinless, boneless filleting-and-canning line.

We and the companies have been making efforts to increase employment. Unfortunately, this season we have reached a crisis because there was a pink salmon failure on the whole coast of British Columbia. That's akin to every single apple crop not coming in with any apples. Pinks are the largest salmon and are the highest producer. They are not the salmon that make fishermen the wealthiest, but they are the salmon that bring most of the work to the plants.

On top of that, we normally have.... Half of our can pack comes in from salmon in Alaska. If we've had a Canadian pink failure in other years, we've relied on Alaska. But Alaska had a pink failure. Our pinks were zero. We are allowed zero catch of pinks this year. Alaska's catch went from 54 million predicted to 11 million. So they went from a catch that should have been 54 million to 11 million, and they were able to process all of that fish in their plants. Their workers are unemployed as well.

What we have done is we have a bunch of desperate people who have been making concessions in their collective agreement, working with the company, working with productivity bonuses, trying to bring their wages up in that way. What they're faced with is no work. On top of that, they're faced with an income this summer that is probably around a third of what they normally have had.

We have provided you with seniority lists. There's one from Massett plant that we have. It's called Omega Packing. This is our plant in Massett. It's the largest employer in Massett, private sector or otherwise. We had five people qualifying to obtain unemployment

insurance this year. The reason is that the number of hours they've had is so small.

Our unemployment insurance area goes from Williams Lake to the Yukon border and from the Charlottes to Alberta, so it's more than half the province. Because of the hot economy of Fort St. John and of the beetle areas of the province, the unemployment rate has been pushed down.

Our unemployment rate remains extremely high, but the number of hours reflects the unemployment rate for the whole region. So we need 595 hours instead of the normal 420 hours that we've needed. But even with the normal 420 hours, many people would not qualify.

We've tried to divide these seniority lists up to show you. So if you had a look at all three of them, which you do have in front of you, you can see that only five people would have qualified this year. You can see that those five people went from 1,000 hours. If you look here, 2,000 hours to 1,264 hours — that person would have qualified; 2,115 hours to 895 hours. If you look down the next page — this is Omega — down the next column, you can see that we had a worker last year who was a labourer and made 653 hours.

Then you can look at a worker who didn't work last year. That's why there are no hours there. And then a worker — you can see 54. That worker was hired by that company in 1954. Maybe most of you were born at that time, but many of you may not have been. She started working for that company in 1954. She made a thousand hours last year. She made 463 hours this year. That's how bad that season was for her.

Crabs have failed. Pink salmon have failed. The DFO has changed fishing rules, and we no longer have been getting groundfish deliveries to that plant.

[1715]

I don't want to repeat what you can read. What we're asking for is the government to help us to continue to bring more work to our fish plants. We've made some suggestions about what we need, because our people want to work. They don't want to be on unemployment insurance.

However, we're also saying that we need to have unemployment insurance regulations changed, and there's going to be a debate in the federal government within the next three months. There was one that started on October 21 about changing the unemployment insurance — the whole scheme — and we're asking that the provincial government educate themselves and encourage the federal government to change the unemployment insurance scheme so that it better reflects the interests of British Columbians.

Thirdly, our people are now going to be on welfare this year because there just aren't jobs, and the welfare rates need to go up. Our people can't live on them. The shelter rates, of course, are problematic, but not as problematic as if you lived in the lower mainland. But people can't exist on the income levels.

We are now having to ramp up food banks, trying to get a community kitchen going, and really, people shouldn't have to be living in poverty and trying to make ends meet on the pittance that welfare is. So we're asking for increased welfare rates.

I'll turn it over to my colleagues.

K. Stewart: My name is Kay Stewart. I've worked with the ocean fish plant for seven years. I'd like to present you with the seniority which shows that 19 workers out of 171 will qualify for EI.

We have tried to get more work at our plant — for example, turbot. Turbot went on quota now, so we haven't had any turbot. The DFO changed the rules, and we have little winter work now. We don't want to be on welfare.

C. Lewis: My name is Conrad Lewis. I've worked for Canadian Fishing Company for 27 years. I, too, would like to present you with the order of our seniority list. What it shows is that 35 labourers out of 900 would qualify for EI benefits.

Out of those 27 years of seniority that I have, when I had probably five I was working eight to ten months out of the year: spring, summer and going into the fall. Now, because of whatever stringent laws, whatever the case may be, I'm down to not even two — you know, a month and three-quarters.

When I roam through this town that our mayor and other people boast about... They boast about it because there are people who still want to stay here, live here, work here and retire here. But right now, with the rules in place, as Joy has mentioned, on EI and welfare, these things seem to be put together to persecute employees rather than encouraging them that: "Yes. There's a downfall in work here for maybe a month or two. This system will allow you to sustain yourself economically for a couple of months while you go look for work."

Right now the perception seems to be that government officials, whether they be EI or welfare, seem to be believe that everybody wants to be there. The mentality inside those offices degrades people that are actually forced to go there, not because they want to go there.

We come here to present you with this list to say that there probably are ways and means, whether it's through you guys or other people within the government system, to make positive changes and to make companies open their eyes and say: "Look, how can we afford to work at a company that keeps its doors open for a month and a half and then closes for eight and a half months and still stay there while other people are looking to find work or go on EI or welfare?"

All the years that I've been here, I've seen more and more homeless people in this town, and that was unheard of when I had five years of seniority and worked eight to ten months. Their numbers aren't being attributed into the factors of employable people. Those people are just nothing. We look and say that our economy is on an upswing. We are only able to say that because those people aren't being counted into the factor — the people outside this very building, the people down the streets, in bushes, under sidewalks. We've never seen that here before. Now we see that.

[1720]

When I go to a big city like Vancouver or Prince George even, I see that every once in a while. But now I'm seeing it more and more. That's why we wanted to

come and say to you that there are ways and means of getting this reversed — an up cycle instead of a down cycle — because you can't go down very much farther. We're pretty well down near the bottom of the barrel, and I'm hoping that there's a way up and a way to prosper and make a difference as British Columbians, as a whole. Thank you.

J. Thorkelson: I'd like to introduce you. These are some of the shoreworkers. We just wanted to put some faces to this, because I think that you go around and hear these kinds of things.... These are working people. [1725]

Interjections.

J. Thorkelson: Just as a conclusion, the reason we asked people to come was to put a face and to say that, because there is, in many cases, an idea that people who are on welfare don't want to work. I guess the question you have to ask yourselves is: these people who stood up here — do you want...?

Their years in the industry are what makes this industry productive. If we take them out of the industry and ship them somewhere else to work for minimum wage.... They're trained and skilled shoreworkers, but they're not trained in anything else. To take them out of an industry like ours, where they're highly skilled, and put them somewhere else where their skills aren't appreciated, they.... You will deskill our industry, and our industry will leave.

We are the most productive, the lowest-cost canning and fresh-fish, cold-storage salmon industry in the world because of our shoreworkers. There are a couple of studies that show that. Our main advantage is our workforce.

What these people want to do is work longer. There have to be some solutions besides changing our collective agreement, and we have listed some. But they also, in times like this when we've had a pink failure.... Our cannery usually cans around 300,000 cases. We canned less than 100,000 cases this year. When there's a pink failure or any kind of failure....

It's just been a horrible season. Our herring failed this year. Our salmon failed this year. Our pink salmon failed this year, and crabs have failed this year. We've had three huge failures. The industry is reeling, and we desperately need some help.

Training programs. We can't access them. We can't access anything. People are driven to welfare, and they can't live on welfare.

That's our presentation. Thank you.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Joy, if I could just.... Certainly, we're over the time for the question period and stuff. I want to thank you. But a couple of quick things, possibly.

The EI issue. I know you're well aware that it's a federal issue. I'm just curious: have you had the opportunity to deal with the Member of Parliament and see...? I mean, I agree. When you look at the vast area that you're talking about and the accumulation of those

hours, there are different areas that do differently economically. Quickly, if you could, have you...? [1730]

J. Thorkelson: Our city council has asked one of our city councillors in Ottawa to meet with the Minister of Employment to explain it. Our MLA and MP have both written letters to the federal government asking them to change our EI area. That would help a few people.

R. Hawes: Is it roughly 1,200 employees? Is that what...?

J. Thorkelson: At Canadian Fish there are 900 employees, and we've only given you part of the seniority list. At Ocean Fish there are 171, and I think 141 or something like that in Massett.

R. Hawes: Which is roughly 1,200.

J. Thorkelson: Roughly, and then there are other plants that are non-union or belong to other unions. But we're all in the same boat.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Just in closing, I'll let you know that the issue of the shelter allowance, the issue of social assistance rates and so on, has been brought before the committee before as well. We will be giving that full consideration as a committee.

We don't make the decisions. We make a decision as to the recommendations we can put forward. But I want to thank you for coming and bringing us not just the story but the human face, as you said, of the people that are affected. Conrad, Kay and Joy, thank you very much.

Our next presentation this afternoon is from the Prince Rupert Community Arts Council, and joining us is Monica Lamb-Yorski.

[B. Ralston in the chair.]

B. Ralston (Deputy Chair): The Chair has just stepped out, I think, to speak with the delegation previous, but go ahead.

M. Lamb-Yorski: I would like to welcome the standing committee on Finance to Prince Rupert. I'm glad you get to see what it looks like here when the sun is shining.

Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Monica Lamb-Yorski. I have lived in Prince Rupert for almost 11 years, and I have been a board member of the Prince Rupert Community Arts Council for six. I have worked at the Prince Rupert City and Regional Archives for two years and freelance for the Prince Rupert *Daily News*, mostly writing about arts and culture in our community.

The Prince Rupert Community Arts Council is made up of volunteers. Our main sources of funding are the city of Prince Rupert and the B.C. Arts Council. That funding coupled with our own fundraising efforts

enables our council to give over \$10,000 in grants annually to member groups from the community who are predominantly running programs at the amateur level.

Other activities include an annual craft fair that attracts participants from across the northwest and a monthly film series featuring foreign and Canadian films. We engage in special projects where we draw on service clubs, businesses and additional grants for support, and we often partner with other organizations to facilitate arts and cultural programs.

On behalf of the Arts Council I am joining with other arts and culture organizations across the province in a request that the standing committee support significantly increasing investment in arts and culture in this province through the British Columbia Arts Council in the 2007-2008 budget.

There was an increase to the B.C. Arts Council in the last budget, and that trickled down to arts councils like ours. I want to let you know that we appreciated those additional funds. Further increases in the next budget will assist the B.C. Arts Council in carrying out its fundamental commitment to artistic excellence. The council's programs are accessible to artists or arts organizations from diverse cultural and regional communities of British Columbia.

You'll see I've outlined five priorities that the B.C. Arts Council has outlined to councils and arts organizations that are applying for funds. These five priorities are the improved sustainability of all B.C. arts and cultural organizations, inclusion of diverse artistic practices, encouragement of emerging artists, development of new art forms like digital media and interarts, and the expansion of opportunities for regional participation.

[1735]

In a climate of fiscal accountability when citizens are asking for transparency, you can be assured that all of us who receive grants from the B.C. Arts Council are required to be accountable financially. In fact, there are many of us across the province releasing sighs of relief this week because our applications for community arts council assistance had to be postmarked October 2.

Now you've had presentations across the province already. They've directed your attention to the fact that arts and culture reaps benefits economically and that investment in arts and culture makes for healthier communities. I agree with those statements. I'm not here to reiterate them but would like to add a few more thoughts.

In the north, distance has its disadvantage when it comes to arts and cultural programs. Michael Sawatzki at the Lester Centre of the Arts estimates it costs \$35,000 to \$40,000 a year for his organization and the Concert Society to bring ten acts to perform in Prince Rupert. Provincial funding helps offset the cost with a \$7,000 grant. Robin Weber, one of the managers at the Museum of Northern B.C., told me sometimes he has to order special supplies in from Vancouver or even Montreal at prohibitive cost.

Even when we run our film night, if the film comes from the distributor in Vancouver, we have to pay to have it shipped both ways, tacking an extra \$100 cost

before we even begin to pay for theatre rental, distributors' fees and advertising.

Volunteerism is also an issue. As I watch the growing costs of housing in this province, I wonder: how many volunteers will there be at the end of this decade? In Prince Rupert the B.C. Annual Dance Competition has been put on hold for a year because the volunteer board that runs the festival each year is in need of more volunteers.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

Many arts and culture programs are run by volunteers. When house prices demand double incomes or poverty drives people to despair, there won't be much energy left for people to volunteer.

Increased funding to arts and culture could create more jobs as people could be hired to run programs and more programs could be made available to more people.

I want to finish off with a story about my own experience with art and community. Four years ago I was doing a story for the newspaper about three skateboarders who were painting designs on skateboards for sale at a local shop. I met them at the skate park for an interview and to take photos. As I looked around I noticed the bare concrete and started thinking. I then said out loud: what do you guys think of a graffiti project here?

I'd been mulling over some sort of community project for a couple of years. When you attend the annual meetings of arts councils each year, participants are challenged by presenters to be more inclusive in their programs and look at ways to engage the community in arts and culture.

When the skaters smiled and said, "Cool," I realized maybe I'd come up with a project that would work. I brought the idea up with our arts council and got the okay. In September 2003 I met with Jeremy Long from the B.C. Arts Council to talk about the project. At that time he told me that I'd need to get my ducks in a row because the competition for project grant money is stiff. Feeling daunted, I decided I'd dodge the October grant deadline and shoot for April, hoping some ducks would start making noise.

By early April feathers had begun to fly. I had financial commitments from service clubs and more young artists keen on the idea. Lucky for me, because I'm not a visual artist, a visual artist with mural experience had relocated to Prince Rupert and was keen to help me out. By Easter weekend I was holed up finalizing a grant proposal to the B.C. Arts Council asking for \$3,000.

Momentum for the project continued to build as university students returned to town and made inquiries. At some point I decided that whether we got funding or not, we had to see it through. There was no going back.

In the first week of July we primed the concrete. A few days later I learned we'd been successful for \$2,100 from the B.C. Arts Council for the project. The committee stated that they wished they could have given us more.

Over the next month my expectations were exceeded. My ballpark of 12 participants grew to a total of 56. Ages ranged from four to 34. Designs included murals, cartoons, tags, logos, lyrics to songs and tributes to some of the teens who had drowned in the harbour a few years back.

[1740]

We opened the doors to the hut where supplies were kept at noon each day and were often there until 1 a.m. and sometimes 2 a.m., with kids projecting images to trace in the dark. I had parents telling me they were letting their children come down to the skate park to hang around because we were there. The project continued through the entire summer, and some youth continued to paint after school in September.

One of the growing experiences for me was getting to know youth in the community beyond the realm of my own children's friends. After the first week, two boys came back in the dark after we'd left and wrote some pretty rude things with pink felt pens on some of the pictures they didn't like. One left his nickname, so the next day when he showed up to skate, I went up and talked to him. I told him and his friend that they'd been invited to be part of the project from the beginning, so why not paint something instead of wrecking someone else's work.

By the next night both boys had some spray paint I provided them with, and they spent a couple of hours tagging an area of the park where they liked to hang out. From then on, we often engaged in conversation and still do when I run into them around town. Before the project was completed, my adult artists created a big piece incorporating that kid's nickname.

I think the project was a success, and it's one of many stories across this province where arts programs have a positive impact on communities.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, thank you, Monica, very much. I'm going to look to members of our committee to see if they have any questions regarding your presentation here this evening.

Possibly I could. Monica, we've had presentations from across the province. Certainly the arts and culture of our province are vitally important. Do you have any idea, cost-wise? We're talking about trying to look for additional investment in the arts and culture. Have you put your mind to an idea of what type of funding overall you would think...? I'm talking spread across. Would we do it through the B.C. Arts Council — the disbursement of those funds? If you've had any thoughts.

M. Lamb-Yorski: I'm advocating, yes, through the B.C. Arts Council.

I would ask you: how much money goes into sports and recreation in the province? Do you know that?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Not off the top, without the budget in front of me. But a comparable amount is what you're thinking?

M. Lamb-Yorski: Yup. I think that would be something to look at.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): All right. Well, Monica, I see that no other members have any questions. I want to thank you. As I indicate to all presenters, it's important, and we're here to listen to the ideas that people bring before our committee for our consideration. Thank you for taking the time here today.

Our next presentation is from the Skeena–Queen Charlotte regional district electoral area F director, Des Nobels.

D. Nobels: Thank you very much, all of you, for coming to Prince Rupert. We always appreciate the opportunity to speak to government at whatever level and whatever opportunity we get.

My name is Des Nobels. I'm actually the director for area A — there's a misprint there — which is the mainland coast. Just to rectify that for the record, it's area A.

I represent four communities with a constituency that is probably about 75-percent first nations. There are four communities that I represent: Lax Kw'alaams, Metlakatla, Crippen Cove and Dodge Cove. Today I'd like to present some of their views with regards to what they believe should take place with the budget and where moneys should be spent. Again there's a focus to the north, of course, in this. I'm sorry. That's a bias I have to carry forward on behalf of my constituents — simple as that.

First of all, with regards to the budget surplus we're looking at for this year — this is a plea from my constituents — please do not give it to the banks. Debt repayment is a wonderful thing. Being in government, I understand the need for having funds in reserve and for paying down debt. But to be perfectly honest here, the banks are doing extremely well at the moment, and I'm sure they could hold off for a little while longer.

Unfortunately, that's not the case for many of the communities I represent. They cannot hold on much longer. I would suggest to you that the surplus be handed back to the rural communities that have provided the wealth that created the surplus. I can tell you right now that those communities would dearly love to have that money. We are dealing with a range of problems.

I think you've become quite aware in your travels that whether you're prospering or you're in despair, we still seem to all handle the same sorts of problems: homelessness, drug issues, crime. You name it. It makes no difference where you are on the scale of things. It comes to your community.

[1745]

The unfortunate thing for our community — which is at a deficit, shall we say — is that we don't have the funds to address those issues. The communities that are doing relatively well and are prospering under the new prosperity of the province at least have the ability to put some funds toward that. We don't, and we would surely and dearly love to see that money returned to our community so that we can address some of the social issues we're dealing with.

I'd hoped to address two issues today — specifically, one around health care and the other around education, both of which have ramifications with re-

gards to the surplus and to the socioeconomic well-being of the region here.

First of all, with education, we have a very significant population here that has what I would term a lot of learning-assistance needs. Unfortunately, in the primary grades in this region we just don't have the staffing levels which allow for that sort of one-on-one that's required with students who are having problems. As such, we see a lot of students struggling, and in the end we actually see a lot of students leaving our school system in the later grades because they just aren't able to cope and haven't been able to cope all the way through. So I would certainly like to see at the lower ends, and my constituents would like to see at the lower ends, some increase in the number of learning assistance and support staff within the schools.

In the upper ends of the educational system, we're looking here at trades. The discussion that is going on over the last couple of years, with the increase in opportunities that we're beginning to see in the region here, requires a significant level of skill development, and to achieve those developments we need to look at further funding into the trades and skills forum in the upper grades.

This area here has an excellent college. They have been doing their utmost to provide what they can. Unfortunately, we have limited space, and we also have a significant problem with regards to opportunities to access funding for people to attend school. As the presentation by the UFAWU pointed out, many people here are in the process of losing their EI eligibility and looking at the social assistance rolls for their next meal. This doesn't lend itself well to entering into post-secondary education or any of the training issues.

There is a significant problem in garnering grants or assistance from either EI or the welfare system here to attain school. In many cases, people either have to leave their jobs or leave their homes, and it's not a good thing. It doesn't work well for us. If we see the developments come to this area that are proposed, then we are going to need a significant skilled workforce. We have people in this region who have significant skills. They just don't have the ticketing that goes with those skills.

What we'd like the opportunity to do is provide them with the ticketing so that they can benefit from those jobs that are proposed for this region. Otherwise, once again they'll be sitting on the sidelines while someone else comes and walks away with the money. That's what we've been looking at for the last ten years here, and I don't know how much longer people are willing to put up with that. It's extremely stressful.

I'll leave that issue, and I'll move on to the issue of health care. Once again, this region once had a very proud hospital, which provided an immense amount of service to the region as a whole, and provided just about every conceivable manner of medical procedure that we could provide.

Over the last 15 years we've watched that erode quite significantly, to the point where at times we are unable to provide proper maternity care. This is not because of the people at the hospital. The people at this

hospital work extremely hard, long hours, providing the best care they can. The problem is in the fact that we just don't have the staffing levels that are required, we don't have the beds that are required, and we have an initiative from the province to look at more regional-type hospitals — the very thing we once were.

The region has gotten so big that Prince George now becomes our regional hospital. We have a bus that has now been initiated in the province to begin to take patients back and forth — a wonderful idea. But when it comes down to dealing with actual logistics of it, it's extremely onerous on the individuals that leave this community.

Most of our linkages are north-south. It has not been east-west. Family establishments are north-south, and as such, this area will continue to travel north-south for its medical care. Our concern is that over the long haul, in this push for regionalization we will no longer have the staffing required even in Vancouver to address our needs there and will be forced into Prince George to look at our medical care. So we're looking at retention of both medical staff in the region — nursing, very important — and the support staff that go with that, all of which has been significantly eroded in this area.

[1750]

I would ask you to seriously consider, again, adding more money to the health care pocket and more money to the educational pocket. I understand these are two high-priority issues and two high-dollar issues, but I don't think I can stress enough the need for them not just in this region but across the north as a whole.

Without these things, how do we begin to attract people to the region to stay here? We have to provide some amenities, and if the education levels and health care levels are not sufficient, the people who come to work here would probably not wish to bring their families and remain here. They will set up a home base elsewhere and travel here for work and leave. That is not good for community.

We need vibrant communities. This community has always been a very vibrant community and has provided for itself. It finds itself on hard times and is looking for a little bit of assistance to carry us through this transition period on to the next boom.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Thank you very much, Des. I'm going to look to members of the committee to see if they have any questions regarding what you've put before us.

J. Horgan: Thanks very much, Des, for your presentation. I think all members would agree with me — although I will probably hear about it on the airplane as we take off — that we've heard different stories as we've travelled across the province. I was anticipating that when we got to the northwest, we wouldn't be hearing the same level of enthusiasm for what's happening today. Certainly, enthusiasm for the future and the projects that are on stream and will be coming forward.... We're all anxious to see that go forward.

But what do we do about today? Your comment about the debt at the start of your presentation left me feeling that you were a bit ambiguous. You would not like to see surplus dollars go to debt reduction. You would rather see those surplus dollars reinvested in the communities, particularly in the northwest. Is that what I heard you say?

D. Nobels: Not necessarily just in the northwest but back to the rural communities that I say have produced that wealth. That wealth has come from the outer regions of this province. I believe that money should, in turn, go back to those communities to deal with the issues they are now attempting to deal with.

B. Simpson: One of the other parts of this is the fact that we do still depend on resources and are still therefore susceptible to the boom-bust cycle. You're indicating to put that money not into the debt but get it back out to the resource communities. What about the idea of some of it going to a heritage fund of some kind? You mentioned, in fact, that local governments have their own buffer. What about the province having some kind of buffer rather than all of it being mandatory going over to the debt?

D. Nobels: I believe there would be support for that type of initiative. One concern that I would raise with regards to that sort of program is that in the past, we've dealt with a number of other programs that government has established where we've had transitional funds and various other funds put forward based on resource dollars to communities to access for economic opportunity.

The unfortunate thing is most of those have come with fairly strict criteria, and they have all been trusts that have essentially not allowed us to access the full money, but just the interest incurred from. For us who live in this part of the world, the interest isn't sufficient to lever what we require to deal with the issues that we have.

For those in the northeast or the southern part of this province that have funds over and above, a trust would work for them. It's something that they can just add to the overall that they have.

For us here, trusts don't work. If it was a fund set up that would be a transition fund or a revitalization fund that we would be able to access and utilize fully, then I think there would be support. If it's another trust initiative, I think you would see a fair bit of balking from the rural communities with regards to that.

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

Des, do you think that in Ottawa and back east, whenever they have a problem — in PEI and Nova Scotia or that area — the federal government seems to change the unemployment qualification period and that the federal government should maybe come back in this area to adjust and consider Prince George and Prince Rupert and Terrace as one area from an unemployment calculation point of view?

D. Nobels: It's always been a sore point in the west how things seem to change rather quickly when eastern needs require. That aside, I think there is a definite need for a revisiting of the EI system as a whole for Canada in general. I believe we should have a very clear, concise picture that is universal for the country as opposed to these divisions that we have and the significant changes and differences that go from region to region.

[1755]

It seems disingenuous on the part of government to create these diversities that leave one doing well and the other sitting in nowhere. So I would agree that, yes, we do need to see that committee coming through and making the changes that are needed to help Canadians.

We're looking at somewhere around \$45 billion sitting in the EI fund at present. Whether it really exists or not, I honestly don't know. But that is money that belongs to the workers of this country; it's not money that government has contributed to. It's workers' money, and it's money that comes from industry as well. It's their portion. So in the end, I believe it's the citizens of Canada that should decide how that fund should be distributed and how it should be dispersed.

R. Lee: You mentioned the debt repayment. Actually, it's not going to the bank; it's in interest. We borrow money previously; then we have to pay. The 7 percent of the budget, \$2 billion each year, is paying interest.

My question is on the idea of health care and education, increasing funding for them. How about infrastructures? We heard some suggestion that in the north, if you build up the infrastructure — the road or transportation network — then more jobs will be created in this area. In which area — say, transportation, health care and public safety — do you think we should reduce the percentage and instead put more money in health care or education?

D. Nobels: Well, as in any budgetary exercise, you know that's always the hard question — isn't it? A couple of years ago my answer might have been a little bit different. But personally, with the amount of time and effort that we presently put into dealing with what I would term socioeconomic issues, the concept of debt reduction at the present time — or, shall we say, increasing infrastructure that would create jobs — seems almost ludicrous. We're beyond that point.

A few years ago we could have said: "Yes, you create these opportunities, and that will fix things." It's no longer the case. We've gone over that edge, and we're at a point now where unless people are fully employed for 12 months of the year for the next 15 years of their lives, they are going to be in distress. That's the reality of what we're dealing with here.

Infrastructure is a wonderful thing. We're creating a huge pile of infrastructure out here with the container port. But in reality, what does that infrastructure actually dictate in the way of jobs and in actual cash flow into this community? That remains to be seen.

If you look at actual jobs, we're looking at possibly 85 to 120 full-time positions. If you take a look at what

we've lost from the fishing industry in the last five years alone, that's over 4,000 jobs. It doesn't really begin to replace what we once had. It's going to take a little bit more than just creating infrastructure that would then create opportunity.

In turn, more often than not those who are employed in the creation of the infrastructure that we have been creating come from outside the community. It's a very small amount of the community that's actually employed within that infrastructure upgrade. So again, it's very hard for me and my constituents to sit here and say, "Yes, those things are important," when we have to feed, clothe and house our families. Those things are fundamentally important at the moment. The rest can wait. That's essentially what we're dealing with here.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Des, I want to thank you on behalf of the committee for coming out. Your presentation will be given full consideration. On behalf of the constituents you represent, I am sure they're happy that you've been here this evening bringing their ideas forward for us to hear.

Moving on, our next presentation this evening is from DesignLink Strategic Resources. I will call on Maatje Piket. Good evening, and welcome.

[1800]

M. Piket: I'd also like to thank you for being here. I think it's wonderful that you are taking the time and the effort to go around the province and get input. I actually had no intention of speaking today. However, this is an issue I feel passionately about. I want to be clear that I am here as an individual, as a citizen of Prince Rupert and not as a consultant.

However, I wanted to build on some of the comments that George Hayes made earlier. He and I have had quite a number of conversations about the Dundas collection, which, as he mentioned — and probably many people are aware of, because it's been well publicized, including in yesterday's *Globe and Mail* but also in the *National Post* and the *Vancouver Sun*....

This is a very controversial and very valuable collection of cultural artifacts that has come from the village of Metlakatla, which is right outside of Prince Rupert. There is a consortium of museums that are attempting.... At this point I don't know what percentage of the collection they were able to purchase, but what I've included for your review are the results of the bidding that happened today at Sotheby's in New York. The collection did sell in its entirety for over \$7 million U.S.

As you can imagine, if we were able to have acquired even half of that collection through the museums — of course, they would have preferred to get the entire collection — then that would have been a real coup, considering that this has been an enormous struggle for years. Without getting into the debate over who has the rights to these cultural artifacts, which were, in fact.... Really, for all intents and purposes, they were stolen from the people of Metlakatla.

It would be an enormous asset for this community if the Museum of Northern British Columbia did in fact

have the opportunity to get some of those. Actually, it would be lovely to have the whole collection together. I don't even know whether the museum would be able to handle the collection here, but they are working with.... The Canadian Museum of Civilization in Gatineau, the Royal British Columbia Museum in Victoria and our own museum are working to get this collection.

Susan Marsden.... Again, I don't want to speak on their behalf, but they're not here to speak to you. Susan is probably in New York as we speak. In any case, I had the opportunity to talk with Carole Taylor briefly yesterday. I mentioned this to her as well. It may be that the B.C. government is in the loop on this. I'm sure they have been approached.

What I would like to say as a private citizen here and somebody who has been involved in marketing for over 25 years, including for first nations artists, is that if there is anything that you can do to assist, to make this happen, to provide the backup and the support.... This represents an unbelievable tourism marketing opportunity for this community, and I would like to quote from yesterday's *Globe and Mail* article. Essentially, it says:

"For economic reasons alone, the B.C. government may have good cause to help the western bidders. The collection could anchor tourism in Prince Rupert, which is undergoing a major port expansion to better accommodate cruise ships. As well, the Tsimshian people are moving forward in their treaty negotiations with the B.C. government. Such objects, if owned by the province and its provincially funded museums, could turn out to be important bargaining chips."

I would like to underscore that. It talks about major port expansion to better accommodate cruise ships. We've already gone through that. We do have the cruise ships here. What we need to be able to do for those cruise ships is offer them a better experience or improve the onshore experience when they are in port. Having this collection here, rooted in Prince Rupert, would be of enormous value to that purpose.

I could say something more, and that is in terms of the European tourists. I don't know if you're aware of why they have such a strong interest in first nations culture, but part of it is that at the same time of the missionary who acquired this collection, which was in the late 1800s, there was also an author by the name of Karl May, who was a German author. Every German, Dutch — and potentially other European countries as well — school child knows these stories. They are about the wilderness experience. This is why so many of these people actually come to western Canada — for the wilderness experience. First nations are integrally linked with that.

That's really all I have to say. I wanted to have that on the record — just how important this really is. I don't know if there's anything you can do to help.

[1805]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, I see there's a question right away. I want to thank you for your presentation and for bringing it to us.

I. Black: Just a quick question of clarity: are you proposing that the government get engaged to purchase the collection through the auction house?

M. Piket: Well, that's already taken place, so I wanted that to be.... Because George brought it up earlier, and he had mentioned that it was on auction, I wanted it to be a matter of public record — what exactly had transpired.

All I'm asking for is anything that the province can do to help support those museums that have been part of the bidding process. It's been a long and complicated process for them, which has already been ongoing for years, to try and acquire this collection. Any support that could be provided would go a long way to helping us develop a more diversified tourism experience here in Prince Rupert as well. It would be very timely.

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Well, I see no further questions.

I do want to thank you, again, for coming forward. Just noting some of the dollar figures in this, it's staggering.

M. Piket: It is, isn't it?

B. Lekstrom (Chair): Yes, it is. Take care and have a good evening.

That concludes our last presenter this evening. We do have an open-mike session that begins at 6:35 and has been advertised. So at this time I'm going to recommend a recess of the committee until 6:30. It is presently 6:07. We stand recessed until 6:30.

The committee recessed from 6:07 p.m. to 6:32 p.m.

[B. Lekstrom in the chair.]

B. Lekstrom (Chair): At this time I would like to reconvene the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. We have no registered presenters in the open-mike session, which we have at the end of each public hearing.

I want to thank the presenters who came out this evening and this afternoon in Prince Rupert and surrounding area and, again, thank them for their hospitality and the great sunshine that we were able to enjoy. With that, the committee will stand adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 6:33 p.m.

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