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of BRITISH COLUMBIA

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THE HONOURABLE RAJ CHOUHAN, SPEAKER

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PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Her Honour the Honourable Janet Austin, OBC

FOURTH SESSION, 42ND PARLIAMENT

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WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2023

The House met at 1:34 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

[1:35 p.m.]

Routine Business

Prayers and reflections: S. Chandra Herbert.

Introductions by Members

I. Paton: Today I'd like to introduce a wonderful young lady I met the other night at — can I say this? — a leader's dinner with 1,000 people at it in Chinatown. I said at the table: "If any of you are ever in Victoria, please feel free to get hold of me. I'll show you around and take you for lunch in the dining room."

Sure enough, the phone rang on Monday morning, and here she is. I'd like to introduce a new friend of mine, Evelyn Lee, an international entrepreneur, she calls herself, and a resident of Vancouver.

Please make Evelyn feel welcome here today.

M. Lee: I understand that we have Jon Coleman here in the gallery. I would like to invite the chamber to join me in welcoming Jon.

Jon, as many of you know, comes from the Cowichan Tribes traditional territory. He is someone who has, for decades, been involved in employing Indigenous and non-Indigenous workers to work on important community infrastructure projects. I understand from Jon that 20 years ago, he moved a mountain — a small mountain. Two weeks to get that done.

He also has his mother, who went to residential school on Kuper Island. As we heard from Eddy Charlie yesterday, we know the importance of reconciliation. I know that from Jon. His strength comes from his grandfather and his mother, who is quite silent in a strong manner about the harms of residential schools and the trauma that it's caused.

I hope that members of this chamber will continue to hear his voice as he speaks out against this government's CBA scheme that blocks workers from working on a project on their territories.

Join me in welcoming Jon Coleman to this House.

Mr. Speaker: Member. Member.

Member, take your seat, please.

Let me caution all members. Please do not try to use introduction time for making political statements. You will not be allowed next time.

Hon. S. Malcolmson: I encourage the chamber to join

me in welcoming my friend and neighbour Ed Chan from Nanaimo, who has joined us here today to witness question period. He's a valued South End community member for Nanaimo and a very strong civic volunteer.

Hon. A. Dix: This morning, members on all sides of the House — many members on the government side, the Leader of the Opposition, the Leader of the Third Party — were part of an event with the Resident Doctors of B.C.

I want to express to Dr. Harrison Anzinger and the whole team here how impressed we were by their commitment to public health care, how all members of the House joined together in our support for them.

As people will know, the Resident Doctors of B.C. have worked very hard in the last year on a new agreement with government, one that was approved at 98.5 percent, which reflects their commitment, ours and I think all members of the House to their role in the future. This is an important time for public health care, and our resident doctors make us proud.

I ask everyone to make them welcome today.

J. Tegart: I'd like to introduce a longtime friend visiting the Legislature for the first time, Sandy Perrin.

I'd ask you to make her feel very welcome.

Hon. B. Bailey: One thing that everyone in all parties in the House will agree to is that we have wonderful people who support our work. One such person from my ministry is here today: Jocelyn Fan, a ministerial assistant.

Would the House please join me in making her feel welcome.

[1:40 p.m.]

S. Bond: I rise to join the Minister of Health in welcoming the Resident Doctors to the Legislature today. Though I was not able to be there, I think it was fantastic that the Leader of the Opposition was there. He came back energized.

One of the things we've learned in this House is that being a physician is not for the faint of heart, but it is certainly for people who have a big heart and want to help care for British Columbians. I want to join with the minister in offering our thanks for the choice of the profession that you've made. We can't wait until you're ready to help us here in British Columbia in even bigger ways.

Welcome to the gallery today.

S. Furstenau: I'm just going to take the opportunity to also introduce my friend Jon Coleman, who is here from Cowichan. Jon has spent 30 years mentoring Aboriginal crews in construction and trades, but he's done more than just train skills. John brings cultural values. He brings knowledge, wisdom, an essential understanding of the territory and the lands on which he and his crews work.

I can say it's only been a few weeks that I've known

Jon, but I am absolutely certain this is the beginning of a lifelong friendship.

Would the House please make Jon most welcome.

K. Greene: I'd like to welcome my friend Tom Ligoeki. He is a successful tech entrepreneur. You may not know him, but he arrived in Canada at the ripe old age of 12, with no English, as a political refugee. He's done incredibly well for himself, Ernst Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award winner, and he's got more projects on the go.

Please make him welcome.

H. Yao: Today I would like to take a moment to wish happy birthday to my baby girl, who's actually watching TV right now. This is the first time I get to start counting her age by years instead of months.

I do want to take a moment to share a little life experience that despite the fact that she's probably 10 percent of my body weight, she takes up half our bed whenever she sleeps. Even though I get to enjoy the hotel stay right now, I still miss having her kicking my face in the middle of the night.

Please join me in wishing her a happy birthday.

A. Olsen: I'd like to introduce Helen Davis and Mark Worthing to the Legislative Assembly today. Helen is a principal in Artemis Wildlife Consultants. Both she and Mark brought the issue of the plight of bear dens to my attention, and I just want to thank them for all the work they do on behalf of nature — there they are, up there — and on behalf of the little bears that are now sleeping, hopefully, in dens until the end of this winter.

HÍSWKE SIÁM. Thank you.

A. Walker: It is always a pleasant surprise to see a constituent but especially nice when it's unexpected.

Would the House please welcome a friend and active volunteer, Caelem Galloway, to this House.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

BILL 3 — MISCELLANEOUS STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

Hon. N. Sharma presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

Hon. N. Sharma: I move that the bill be introduced and read for a first time now.

I'm pleased to introduce Bill 3, the Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. This bill amends the following statutes: the Ecological Reserve Act, the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Hospital Act,

the Insurance Corporation Act, the Local Government Act, the Medicare Protection Act, the Park Act, the Protected Areas of British Columbia Act, the Special Accounts Appropriation and Control Act.

This bill also makes repeals, validation and confirmation provisions as well as consequential and housekeeping amendments. I will be pleased to elaborate on the nature of these amendments during the second reading of this bill.

Mr. Speaker: Members, the question is the first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

Hon. N. Sharma: I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of this House after today.

Bill 3, Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

[1:45 p.m.]

BILL 4 — FINANCE STATUTES AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

Hon. K. Conroy presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Finance Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

Hon. K. Conroy: I move that the bill be introduced and read a first time now.

I am pleased to introduce the Finance Statutes Amendment Act, 2023. People in B.C. need to be protected from violators of securities laws when buying and selling securities. These amendments will help the B.C. Securities Commission to better respond to investment fraud in a meaningful way, in a continually changing sector, to protect investors in B.C.

The bill introduces two main objectives. The first is to approve the B.C. Securities Commission's ability to enforce securities laws and collect fines. Right now the B.C. Securities Commission has the strongest enforcement and collection capabilities in Canada, and in a constantly involving sector, it's important to continue to update the Securities Act so it doesn't fall behind. These amendments will build on the BCSC's existing strengths, through a range of tools, for the organization to protect investors from fraud and other violations of securities laws.

The second objective of this bill is to make sure B.C. securities laws remain in step with other provinces' regulations. Ensuring the act is in line with other jurisdictions is one of the biggest concerns of the securities industry. This harmonization will help to improve market efficiency and create a better-functioning capital market.

Mr. Speaker: Members, the question is the first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

Hon. K. Conroy: I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 4, Finance Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

BILL M201 — PROVINCIAL SALES
TAX (USED PASSENGER VEHICLES)
AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

P. Milobar presented a bill intituled Provincial Sales Tax (Used Passenger Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2023.

P. Milobar: I move that a bill intituled Provincial Sales Tax (Used Passenger Vehicles) Amendment Act, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, be introduced and now read for a first time.

As British Columbia faces a worsening cost-of-living crisis, people are looking to their leaders for relief. Right now 44 percent of British Columbians report being less than \$200 away from insolvency at the end of each month. Fifty-eight percent of people are saying it is becoming less affordable to feed themselves and their family, and 54 percent say transportation has become much less affordable.

It's clear that action is needed to help people cope with skyrocketing costs. That is why I'm reintroducing the Provincial Sales Tax (Used Passenger Vehicle) Amendment Act. This act would amend the changes around taxing used vehicles made last spring and set the PST rate of zero percent for used vehicles costing less than \$20,000 that have been previously purchased and driven at least 6,000 kilometres. This measure would provide up to \$2,400 of tax relief on used vehicle purchases and would help many people who can't afford an electric vehicle and who are facing increased costs of living.

As everything from gas to groceries to housing gets more expensive, we must take steps to finally provide real, tangible support to the millions of British Columbians who are struggling to make ends meet.

Mr. Speaker: The question is the first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

P. Milobar: I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting after today.

Bill M201, Provincial Sales Tax (Used Passenger Vehicles) Amendment Act, 2023, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

BILL M202 — WILDLIFE
AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

A. Olsen presented a bill intituled Wildlife Amendment Act, 2023.

A. Olsen: I move that a bill intituled Wildlife Amendment Act, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, be introduced and read a first time now.

For over 20 years, experts have been advocating for laws to protect bear dens in British Columbia, but the province continues to lack a comprehensive legal protection for bear dens. Despite legislative protections in Haida Gwaii and the Great Bear Rainforest, much of the province continues to lack these mechanisms to protect these essential habitats. As a result, bear dens have been left to a patchwork of policies by logging companies, which are inconsistent and unenforceable.

Earlier this year the Environmental Law Centre at the University of Victoria and the B.C. Sierra Club published a study recommending provincial legislation that protects bear dens. The act before us today makes these essential changes. It sets out that if a person disturbs, molests, damages or destroys a bear den, they have committed an offence.

[1:50 p.m.]

Further, this protection stands on both Crown land and private land, which is an essential component, given the proliferation of private-managed forest lands in pockets of British Columbia.

We are currently living through the sixth mass extinction caused by human activity, and it's more important than ever to protect the biodiversity of our province. This includes protecting bear dens, where bears hibernate and birth and raise their young.

Mr. Speaker: Members, the question is the first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

A. Olsen: I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill M202, Wildlife Amendment Act, 2023, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

BILL M203 — CORRECTIONS STATUTES
AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

A. Olsen presented a bill intituled Corrections Statutes Amendment Act, 2023.

A. Olsen: I move that a bill intituled the Corrections Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, be introduced and read a first time now.

I reintroduce this bill in this House to continue to raise attention to the human rights of British Columbians held in corrections facilities. On any given day, like today, there are 33 individuals in solitary confinement who have been there for longer than 15 days, some longer than 60 days. Both adults and youth are subjected to this reality.

Solitary confinement disproportionately impacts Indigenous people, in particular Indigenous women and girls. Close to a quarter of people in solitary confinement in this province identify as Indigenous, making up only 6 percent of our province's population. In February of last year, the Union of B. C. Indian Chiefs called solitary confinement "a re-traumatizing, abusive and colonial form of control over Indigenous bodies."

This bill seeks to prohibit the use of prolonged solitary confinement and change standards of living for people in the justice system. This bill prohibits a person from being held in solitary confinement if they are pregnant, at risk of self-harm or suicide, have a prescribed disability or require medical observation.

Finally, this bill requires the provincial director of correctional centres to publish annual disaggregated statistics on the number of individuals held in solitary confinement.

This bill follows advocacy from the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, the B.C. Ombudsperson, the B.C. Representative for Children and Youth and the decision from the B.C. Court of Appeal. I want to thank the Campaign for the Abolition of Solitary Confinement for their continued advocacy and work to keep this issue in discussion.

Thank you to the members of this chamber for their consideration of this important work, and I hope to debate this bill at second reading.

Mr. Speaker: The question is the first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

A. Olsen: I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill M203, Corrections Statutes Amendment Act, 2023, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

BILL M204 — FREEDOM OF INFORMATION
AND PROTECTION OF PRIVACY
AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

A. Olsen presented a bill intituled Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2023.

A. Olsen: I move that a bill intituled Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2023, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, be introduced and read a first time now.

In 2021, the government amended the act to allow public bodies to charge an application fee for making a freedom-of-information request. I was a member of the special committee to review the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act and heard from many organizations and individuals who opposed the introduction of an application fee.

The special committee recognized that access to information is vital for promoting trust in public bodies. The committee heard that secrecy of information can undermine democracy and lead to extremism and that conspiracy theories and extremist ideologies can arise when citizens do not have access to information held by the government.

The act before us today aims to improve access to information. It sets out to remove the application fee for freedom-of-information requests. These amendments are in line with the sharp criticism from the B.C. Information and Privacy Commissioner, Michael McEvoy, who strongly indicated that the \$10 fee to access information was not in the interest of the public. He noted that political requests were already in decline before this fee was introduced, and following the fee, journalists, researchers and community groups felt the most significant barriers to getting public information.

Right now there is a waning public confidence in democracy in a time of growing fear and misinformation and a time when people are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories and less likely to trust their government. This assembly needs to be held to a higher standard. The truth needs to be readily accessible and available.

[1:55 p.m.]

Mr. Speaker: Members, the question is first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

A. Olsen: I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill M204, Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Amendment Act, 2023, introduced, read a first

time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

BILL M205 — EQUAL PAY REPORTING ACT

R. Merrifield presented a bill intituled Equal Pay Reporting Act.

R. Merrifield: I move that a bill entitled the Equal Pay Reporting Act, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, be introduced and read for the first time now.

As I speak on the importance of implementing equal pay legislation, I rise in solidarity with all women in British Columbia who are still waiting for the government to address B.C.'s pay gap, the worst in the country. Women have and continue to play a critical role in our economy, yet while they contribute to our province's success despite the many barriers in their way, recent reports show that women earn 16.6 percent less than their male counterparts. This is unacceptable, and this bill aims to address this inequity.

According to the Canadian Women's Foundation, it would take more than 267 years to close the economic gender gap if present trends continue. What's disappointing is that despite the multiple calls for action on the clearly unjust pay gap in B.C., under two different Premiers nothing has changed. This is the sixth time this legislation has been brought forward to this government — the sixth time.

The Equal Pay Reporting Act is merely a first step towards equity. We are privileged with the power to prescribe transformational measures and compel employers to do what's right and what is best for British Columbians. This bill would require any employer in B.C. with 50 or more employees to publicly post an annual breakdown of wages in their business. This information will include wage and bonus pay for male and female employees and will be available on a company website or by any other easily accessible means.

We have an opportunity to show that actions always speak louder than words. B.C. women expect the Premier and his government to deliver on equality as promised in the last election campaign.

For the sixth time and for all the women who deserve to be properly compensated for their hard work, skills and talents, I hope this House will support our call for the equal treatment of women in the workforce.

Mr. Speaker: Members, the question is the first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

R. Merrifield: I move that the bill be placed on the

orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill M205, Equal Pay Reporting Act, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

BILL M206 — LAND TITLE AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

K. Kirkpatrick presented a bill intituled Land Title Amendment Act, 2023.

K. Kirkpatrick: I move that a bill entitled Land Title Amendment Act, 2023, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, be introduced and read for a first time now.

Racial segregation should belong in a history book not in any legal document in 2023. Unfortunately, despite being void and unenforceable, racial covenants are still common on property titles across British Columbia. This is why I am reintroducing this bill.

Although I don't like to read this aloud, it's a common example of such a covenant: "No person of the African or Asiatic race or of African or Asiatic descent, except servants of the occupier of the premises and residents, shall reside or be allowed to remain on the premises." Such language is exclusionary, demeaning and incredibly offensive.

This bill, the Land Title Amendment Act, 2023, would require registrars to fully remove such discriminating covenants from land titles. Just striking these unacceptable covenants out is not enough as they are still visible and very hurtful to read.

We must use these tools we have to undo historical wrongs. No one should continue to suffer from xenophobia. Hate has no place in our society.

Mr. Speaker: Question is the first reading of the bill.

Motion approved.

K. Kirkpatrick: I move that the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill M206, Land Title Amendment Act, 2023, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

[2:00 p.m.]

**Statements
(Standing Order 25B)**

VERNON WINTER CARNIVAL

H. Sandhu: Recently on a Saturday morning, I had the privilege and honour to participate in the 63rd annual Vernon Winter Carnival parade. It was wonderful to see people so excited, happy, cheering and clapping with enthusiasm while watching the floats, classic cars and musicians pass by.

The flagship event kicks off one of my community's oldest, most beloved traditions. For the past 63 years, the people of Vernon-Monashee have looked forward to the seasonal event where generations of families and people of all ages come together in this wonderful community celebration, which is the largest winter carnival in western Canada.

The Vernon Winter Carnival Society is a non-profit organization run by a volunteer board of directors. Each year, they host hundreds of events over a ten-day period at the beginning of February, and every year they have a new theme. This year, they are hosting 132 events with the theme of "Carnival TV," which will celebrate and honour TV shows from the past and present.

Given the challenges we have faced over the past two years, coming together as a community is more important than ever, and Vernon Winter Carnival has been a beacon of light in these times of struggle and uncertainty, allowing people of Vernon-Monashee to put aside differences and come together in celebration.

Once again this year, I want to take the time to thank the hard-working volunteers who have made this possible, for gracefully navigating, adapting and continuing this tradition, despite many challenges, over the last couple of years. Without their countless hours of planning, dedication and tireless efforts, the Vernon Winter Carnival would not have been possible.

I would like to ask members of this House to please join me to thank these amazing volunteers and our community for demonstrating what is possible when we work together for a common goal by putting our differences aside.

CNR HOPE STATION HERITAGE SITE

J. Tegart: I'm so proud to represent the riding of Fraser-Nicola, which features a rich history and a number of important and unique heritage sites. One such site can be found in the community of Hope, and it needs our support to be restored and reinvented.

The historic 1916 CNR Hope Station closed in 1984. It was purchased by the community at that time and relocated, serving as an arts and culture centre and a hub for musicians. It was facing demolition in 2020, but a grass-roots campaign emerged to save it and made some important discoveries in the process.

It turned out the station had strong connections to the history of Japanese-Canadian internment and to Indigenous peoples whose homes and lands were displaced by the railways. In a bid to educate the public about the past while offering a new vision for the future, the Tashme historical society and the district of Hope are proposing a heritage, tourism and education space for the site. It would feature a museum, a visitors centre, a restaurant, co-working offices and event hosting opportunities.

This is where you come in. Hope station is a finalist in the National Trust's Next Great Save, a national heritage competition that will award \$50,000 to the project with the most votes by February 22.

I urge all of you to please visit nationaltrust.ca and cast your vote so Hope Station can serve as an important educational and cultural site in British Columbia's interior for years to come.

EARTHQUAKES IN TÜRKIYE AND SYRIA

A. Singh: Our hearts and minds are with the people of Türkiye and Syria and their families and friends in British Columbia.

On Monday, southern Türkiye and northern Syria were rocked by a 7.8 magnitude earthquake, followed by a second 7.5 magnitude earthquake. The quakes have killed more than 12,000 people in Türkiye and northern Syria, and the toll is expected to rise as rescuers search the rubble.

[2:05 p.m.]

I can't even imagine what is going through the hearts and minds of loved ones. It's estimated at this time that almost 300,000 people have been displaced from their homes in northern Syria. This, added to the years of war and foreign intervention, just further exacerbates a disastrous humanitarian crisis.

Monday's quake was Türkiye's largest disaster since 1939. The terrible loss and hardship the people of Türkiye and Syria are experiencing is devastating. Our thoughts are with everyone impacted and with those working to respond to the tragedy. Our newly created Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness met with Public Safety Canada on Monday morning and let them know that B.C. is standing by and is able to assist if needed.

Newly created Minister Ma also met with the Turkish consul general and conveyed our deepest sympathies and readiness to support. We understand that they have received a request for humanitarian international assistance from the Turkish government and are in close contact with officials. We welcome Canada's announcement of an initial emergency humanitarian response of \$10 million to support the people of Türkiye and Syria.

On Monday evening, volunteers gathered at Mavi Jeans warehouse at 580 Industrial Avenue in East Vancouver, where more than 400 boxes and 12 pallets were prepared for the first of several planned Turkish Airlines flights for

an emergency mission. A Turkish café in Kitsilano, Simit Bakery, is hoping to organize a local fundraiser for earthquake recovery efforts.

I'm also heartened to see that today, members of the Burnaby firefighters shipped out to help in the rescue efforts in Türkiye. The Burnaby USAR team is composed of IAFF 323 members and others who help those in need, no matter where in the world that takes them.

I encourage everyone to reach out to their friends in the Turkish and Syrian diaspora and to help as much as they can. There are some incredible organizations you can donate to and support: Mavi Jeans, Simit Bakery, Doctors Without Borders, UNICEF, amongst others.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

T. Wat: The month of February is an important time of the year, as it marks Black History Month in British Columbia. This annual commemoration is a time for us to remember and celebrate the many significant contributions and accomplishments of Black Canadians in our province. It's also an opportunity to self-educate and raise awareness of the vital role that people of African descent have played in B.C.

Black Canadians have long faced various forms of racialized injustice and have always displayed resilience and determination to build a more inclusive and accepting society. I am reminded of Black British Columbians such as Barbara Howard, from Vancouver, the first Black woman to represent Canada in an international athletic competition in 1938, or Emma Stark, who made \$40 a month as the first Black school teacher on Vancouver Island in 1874. Black History Month is a time to celebrate the successes and triumphs of the Black community despite many systemic barriers.

As the shadow minister for multiculturalism and on behalf of the B.C. Liberal caucus, I invite everyone to take the time to learn more about the history of Black Canadians in B.C., as we affirm our commitment to building a province free of discrimination and hate.

KURDISH CANADIAN SOCIETY AND FOOD SECURITY INITIATIVES

G. Begg: I'm pleased today to rise in this House to celebrate the good work of a charitable organization centered in my riding of Surrey-Guildford. Headed up by Izmit Simu and Jenny Ferguson, the Kurdish Canadian Society opened its doors in April 2020 as a diverse and multicultural non-profit organization with a mission to support those in need, with basic necessities like education, training, food and other resources to help improve the quality of lives in Canada.

Their emergency food box program provides those in need with groceries like fruit, vegetables, breads and meat. Their volunteer team picks up food that is being wasted

or is near the end of its shelf life in major retail grocery stores and redistributes it, to be consumed immediately. This reduces waste and feeds the community with items that are nutritious and essential to a balanced diet.

The KC Society is committed to supporting Lower Mainland community members who every day are facing food insecurity.

[2:10 p.m.]

They understand the impact that lack of access to nutritious foods can have on both physical and mental health and are dedicated to providing support to those in need through this food program. They continually work towards ensuring that everyone in our community has access to foods they need so they can thrive. They're focused entirely on making a real difference in the lives of those around them, anchored together in the belief that stronger and more resilient communities will be built if we all work together.

To date, the KC Society has removed more than 6,600 kg of food from being in landfills and given out roughly 11,000 meals to people in the community in the past year. Food security is a growing issue with inflation, and they're seeing a huge and growing demand. They serve over 100 families every week and over 500 people weekly on the streets and in the shelters.

I know all members of the House will join me in celebrating the dedicated efforts that the Kurdish Canadian Society expends every day for others.

WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SCIENCE

R. Merrifield: I love science. I loved it as a young girl, and I still love it today. But when I was in university, there was a lot of societal pressure, which urged me to pursue a different path.

As a mother, it was my honour and privilege to encourage my own daughter to pursue her love of science. She would say to me, growing up: "Science and math just make sense, Ma. I like that there is a right or wrong answer. It's like black and white." Today her love of science has taken her all the way into her graduate studies.

February 11 is the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. It's a day to celebrate the achievements of women and girls in sciences around the world but especially here in B.C. Science and technology play a crucial role in shaping our world and improving our lives. However, for far too long women and girls have been underrepresented in these fields. According to a recent report, only 30 percent of researchers worldwide are women. Celebrating the achievements of women and girls in science encourages many young girls to pursue careers in these fields.

In B.C., we are fortunate to have a rich history of accomplished women in STEM — for example, Dr. Sandra Louise Schmid, the first chief scientific officer of the Chan Zuckerberg Biohub, or Dr. Gail Murphy, a computer sci-

entist at the University of British Columbia who has developed innovative software that has had a significant impact on the field of software engineering.

International Day of Women and Girls in Science is a crucial reminder of the importance of diversity and equality in STEM. By providing them with access to quality education, promoting female role models in STEM and removing barriers that prevent women from pursuing careers in these fields, we can help to ensure that they have the opportunities they need to succeed.

I urge all members of this assembly to work towards creating a future where women and girls have equal opportunities to participate and succeed in these fields so that we will have even more accomplished women and girls of B.C. to celebrate in the future.

Oral Questions

GOVERNMENT ACTION ON ISSUES IN HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

K. Falcon: Time and time again with this government, we see that they are good at making announcements and issuing press releases but terrible when it comes to getting results. Never is this more evident than in health care.

One out of five British Columbians cannot access a family doctor. Cancer care wait times amongst the worst in the country. One million British Columbians are on a wait-list trying to see a specialist. Hundreds of thousands are waiting to get basic medical imaging.

The latest report that just came out shows that wait times at walk-in clinics have more than doubled in the last three years, the worst in the country. Just this morning in the member for North Vancouver–Lonsdale's riding, there was a five-hour wait at the Northshore Medical Clinic. At the other clinic at Lonsdale and 19th, it had hit capacity ten minutes after opening.

[2:15 p.m.]

My question is this. At a time where we're seeing the worst wait times in the country, when will this Premier and minister and government understand that government is about more than making announcements and issuing press releases? It's about doing the hard work of rolling up your sleeves and getting improved results for British Columbians.

Hon. A. Dix: That's exactly what we're doing.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: The minister will continue.

Hon. A. Dix: The Leader of the Opposition is contributing as much to health care as he did when he was the Minister of Health.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh, Members. Members.
The minister will continue.

Hon. A. Dix: With respect to primary care, last summer the Leader of the Opposition opposed this.

We've put in place new new-to-practice contracts for longitudinal family practice, for family care, for family doctors in the community, for new doctors. Typically we'd get 20 to 30 such contracts. So far we have 109 in communities across B.C.

We sat down with doctors in B.C. and worked out a new payment model, the most significant reform to primary care in the history of the public health care system. It's been around....

Interjections.

Hon. A. Dix: The Leader of the Opposition may not have joined, but in the one week it's been in place, 1,726 family doctors in B.C. have joined.

We are adding 128 new spaces to the UBC medical school. We're establishing a new SFU medical school. We are making changes to make lives and access to primary care there for British Columbians. We've added 30 urgent and primary care centres, and yes, hon. Speaker, they've served 1.6 million B.C. patients.

That's action. That's the action that's needed now, and it compares favourably to a Leader of the Opposition who announced a plan for primary care networks, 159 of them, and delivered exactly zero.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Official....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh, Members.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: No, no. Hold it.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
The Leader of the Official Opposition has the floor.

K. Falcon: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can't wait to share with the member headlines like "B.C. No. 1 in Health Care" when we were in government. I am certainly happy to share that with the member opposite.

The minister likes to stand up and spout off statistics. Only this group over here actually thinks anything is get-

ting better in the health care system. Nobody else in the province thinks it's actually getting better.

The fact of the matter is that one out of five British Columbians can't get access to a doctor. So those patients that have no attachment to a doctor are required — forced, indeed — to go to a walk-in clinic. The problem is that when they go to a walk-in clinic, they now face, based on this minister, a second term in government.... They've been there six years. It's not like he just woke up and six months ago they're trying to make.... This is year 6 of their government.

When people try to go to those walk-in clinics, they're facing the longest wait times in the country. In North Vancouver, the worst in the entire country. In Victoria, the urgent primary care centre, which he likes to go on about, was at capacity this morning 45 minutes after it opened. Good luck finding an urgent primary care centre or a walk-in clinic in some places. They don't exist.

I just heard from Blaine in Quesnel, who I met with earlier this summer. Blaine has had three strokes. He has no family doctor, and he desperately needs to get paperwork signed by a doctor because he's trying to apply for his long-term benefits, which he's entitled to. So what does he do? He goes to the local walk-in clinic in Quesnel. There's a sign on the door saying it's permanently closed. Then when he phones that minister's urgent primary care centre that he likes to go on about, the receptionist says there won't be a doctor here for another six days.

[2:20 p.m.]

Drastic change is needed. The fact of the matter is this Premier has really made it clear that he is going with the status quo not just with this minister that's failed for six years but with the other 64 vice-presidents earning \$400,000 a year in the health care field. Now we find out another high-priced consultant, Penny Ballem, working in the Premier's office.

I have a simple question to the minister on behalf of Blaine, who asked me to ask you: despite all the high-priced vice-presidents — 64 of them; they've got seven in Alberta — and all of the executives and the high-priced consultants in the Premier's office, why can't Blaine find a doctor to fill out some basic paperwork so he can get his long-term benefits?

Mr. Speaker: Members, before I recognize the Minister of Health, I want to remind all members not to use any props while you're asking questions or answering a question.

Minister of Health.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Member.

The minister will continue.

Hon. A. Dix: You know, Hon. Speaker, I think some

people believe — some people — that you keep repeating the same thing that's not true over and over again....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh, shhh. Members. Okay, Members. Members.

The minister will continue.

Hon. A. Dix: Hon. Speaker, they keep repeating the 64 vice-presidents over \$400,000. It's false. It was false when they first said it. It was false last year. It's still false. The fact is.... Hon. Speaker, it's not like they don't have access to the information. They have the information. Here are the facts — if they're interested in the facts, I suppose. We had, when I became Minister of Health, 64 vice-presidents. We have 64 vice-presidents now. We have added, it's true, six vice-presidents for Indigenous health, an action that was supported by the official opposition. Those are the facts.

What are the facts? That the increase in salary for vice-presidents in the health authorities is less than collective agreements. Those are the facts. People can keep repeating stuff all they like. A number of members of the opposition have repeated this fact. It's just not true, and I think that....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh, shhh.

Hon. A. Dix: I know that they don't want to hear the answer. The answer is that the way that you change primary care is to fundamentally work with doctors and nurse practitioners and nurses to change the system. That's precisely what we're doing.

We can listen to the Leader of the Opposition, or we can listen to the 1,726 doctors who have signed up for the new payment model. We can listen to the Leader of the Opposition, or we can listen to the 98.5 percent of resident doctors who supported the agreement that we negotiated with them to improve primary care for all British Columbians.

Our health care professionals and our health care workers, often treated with utter contempt — in particular, by the Leader of the Opposition over the years they were in office, with utter contempt by them — deserve our thanks and appreciation for their extraordinary work during these three years of pandemic. They deserve better than this. They deserve our support, our commitment, our investment in change, and that is what they are getting.

S. Bond: Well, the minister knows that not one person on this side of the House has treated health care professionals with disrespect. We have stood up day after day and supported them and thanked them. The person that we are concerned about is this minister and his lack of action for six years.

That answer is exactly why British Columbians have had it, because Blaine deserves better than that.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members, come to order, please.

S. Bond: Blaine is simply asking for this minister to find a way to get his paperwork done.

[2:25 p.m.]

It's not just Blaine, and the minister knows it. And it's not just wait times in walk-in clinics. Today as we speak...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Please continue.

S. Bond: Today, as we speak, there are literally hundreds of thousands of British Columbians that are waiting without timely access to absolutely essential diagnostic imaging. Yesterday, in fact, I heard from someone, a woman who is absolutely in agony waiting for imaging. Maybe the minister would like to speak to her.

Think about it. She's been in constant pain for seven months, even though the benchmark, the maximum, is 60 days for the procedure. Now she's been told that the Jim Pattison outpatient and surgical centre in Surrey will not book or perform CT scans for any patients that is considered level 3 or 4.

To be perfectly clear to the minister, this isn't about the staff there or anywhere in the system. They are doing their utmost to meet the needs of British Columbians. Is the minister aware of that situation at Jim Pattison, and if he is, what is he going to do about it?

Hon. A. Dix: On the issue of diagnostic care, here's what we've done. In British Columbia, in 2017, I became Minister of Health. There was one MRI machine operating 24-7; there are now nine. There were four operating 19 hours a day, seven days a week before I became Minister of Health; there are now 19.

In 2017, we completed 174,000 MRIs. Those are people in B.C. Those aren't numbers. The worst record in the country. We have reduced the 90th percentile wait time, which is a major measure, by more than 100 days since they were in government. We've gone from 174,000 MRIs to 300,000, in a pandemic, in four years.

We did it by training people, by providing better service and using our public health resources more, and, yes, in Surrey in particular, adding three MRI machines. We've also increased CT scans by 220,000 people — every one of them an individual, every one of them needing that care, every one of them referred by a doctor.

On individual issues — the member will know this — I will always talk to people, always engage with people,

always take cases from members of the opposition and from everywhere else to address issues of individuals.

But the record is clear. The worst place in B.C. to get an MRI before I became Minister of Health was in the Northern Health Authority, 22 per 1,000 against an average in Ontario of 66. That was the record after 16 years in government. We have more than doubled that in five years. We did it because it is critical for people to get diagnostic care when they need it.

I'm happy to look into the case brought forward by the hon. member, but the record is clear. While the Leader of the Opposition, when he was Minister of Health, left MRI machines idle, we are using them all the time to deliver better care.

Mr. Speaker: The Member for Prince George–Valemount, supplemental.

S. Bond: Well, I can assure you that answer is exactly why British Columbians are frustrated. The minister ignores the fact that there are hundreds of thousands of British Columbians in pain waiting for services. In fact, the woman that I spoke to yesterday.... Here's what she said about this Minister's record: "We've got to the point where we can't get sick."

Again, to the minister, when is he going to stop dismissing the pain and agony that thousands of British Columbians are experiencing?

The minister can roll his eyes, but I can tell you this: every single MLA in this Legislature hears from British Columbians virtually every day about the waits and the pain, and the frustration. When is he going to acknowledge it and fix the problem?

Hon. A. Dix: When you're talking about diagnostic care, you fix the problem by adding diagnostic care to ensure....

Interjection.

Hon. A. Dix: The Leader of the Opposition is living in some sort of world. I don't know what world it is.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

[2:30 p.m.]

Hon. A. Dix: I wonder if he's been to Surrey recently. I know he used to represent it. But in Surrey...

Interjection.

Hon. A. Dix: Yeah, he sold the land in Surrey. He sold the land. They needed a hospital. He sold the land, and now he pretends to care for them.

The way that you advance diagnostic care is to do more diagnostic care. The facts are the facts. You can look at the Canadian Institute for Health Information. His record, terrible. Our record, one of the best in Canada. Clearly, they're in on some sort of conspiracy over there at CIHI.

Hon. Speaker, 174,000 of 300,000 in four years is an extraordinary achievement not by me but by technicians, by radiologists, by people in the system. It's their success. The reduction in wait times is their success, and we have to continue do more. But that is an exceptional change.

Adding machines so that people don't have to go and get private care with their own money and then come back into public health care, creating two-tier care. That's the Leader of the Opposition's response. But delivering care in the public health care system full on, all the time — that's what we do in diagnostic care.

I am happy to look at any case brought forward by anybody.

COWICHAN HOSPITAL
REPLACEMENT PROJECT
AND COWICHAN TRIBES CONTRACTORS

S. Furstenau: Two days ago we heard in the throne speech: "People who work hard and play by the rules need someone on their side. Your government will be there for you."

My question is to the Premier. Can the Premier explain why Cowichan Tribes contractors who work hard and play by the rules do not have the government on their side and cannot benefit from helping to construct the \$1.45 billion Cowichan District Hospital replacement project?

Hon. A. Dix: I thank the member for her question. The Cowichan Hospital project is a critical project for health care on Vancouver Island. I'm very proud of the project. We're adding 52 new acute care beds.

Interjection.

Hon. A. Dix: You know, hon. Speaker, leaders set examples, and that leader keeps setting an example. But I'm going to answer the question.

A hospital project that ought to have been built probably 15 years ago is being built in Cowichan now. It's going to significantly improve acute care services, significantly improve mental health services, allow us to address surgery needs in a community that is now underserved for acute care because of its growing size and the community. That's what we've done on the project.

It's clearly important to the member. We've had meetings that she organized, that I've been at, in her community on this project. I understand it's important to her. It's important to the member for Nanaimo–North Cowichan as well and for all of their constituents.

On the question that she's raised, we've had ongoing

conversations with the Cowichan Tribes, and we've worked to bring all parties together to involve, to share information and talk through challenges. That's how you solve issues. As a result, the Khowutzun Development Corp. is now eligible for work on the Cowichan Hospital site without a change to their workforce.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Third Party, supplemental.

S. Furstenau: It's fascinating to me. We have Jon Coleman in the gallery right now of Jon-co Contracting, who has not been allowed to work on this site. A member of Cowichan Tribes, a man who has, for 30 years, mentored Indigenous people in the trades and who, in October, had the job at the site of clearing the land and then was told he would not be given any further permits to work at the site and that he and Khowutzun Development Corp. are not part of the specified unions identified in the somewhat ironically named community benefits agreement.

[2:35 p.m.]

What's interesting is that this change appears to have happened on November 8, when B.C. Infrastructure Benefits and Allied Infrastructure and Related Construction Council,

the two organizations who are empowered by this government to oversee the community benefits agreement.... They signed a letter of understanding removing the ability of Khowutzun Development Corp., Jon Coleman and local contractors to be able to work at the site, a change that left Jon and his colleagues out of work.

Let's quote directly from the community benefits agreement: "To ensure that individuals, communities and businesses in the local area have full and fair opportunity to participate in the benefits of the project." That is certainly not the case for Jon Coleman. This is a long way from reconciliation.

Mr. Speaker: Question, Member.

S. Furstenau: This government seems to have underestimated the power that they gave to BCIB and AIRCC who, in essence, are excluding Indigenous peoples and local contractors from a project that has been community-led and community-driven for decades. This is a project this community has moved.

Mr. Speaker: Question, Member.

S. Furstenau: My question is to the Premier. When can Jon Coleman and the other companies in Cowichan expect to be able to work on the hospital that is being built on Cowichan Tribes territory?

Hon. A. Dix: I answered the question. They're now eligible, and they'll now be working on the project. I think that what I would say about this important project is....

I agree this is a project that people in Cowichan have fought hard for and believe in. Our MLA does. I know the MLA does. The community does. The site has been developed with local communities and local First Nations. We've worked together to bring everybody together to succeed in that.

The result of that is that all of the community benefits agreements that the member referred to in the way that she did.... All of them are living within 100 kilometres of the site; 25 percent are Indigenous. The average on such a site would normally be 6 percent.

Those are real successes out of a process that was designed to promote local hire and community involvement. As I said in answer to the first question, because I think it's what you wanted to know.... The question was when. The answer is now; they're now eligible.

DRUG DECRIMINALIZATION PROGRAM AND FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS

T. Stone: Well, first, listening to the previous interaction there, I want to start off by saying how refreshing it is to hear that the Greens have finally come around and no longer support these community rip-off agreements, after supporting them for all those years, propping up the NDP government.

But my question today relates to the NDP's decriminalization policy. The overwhelming focus of this government on the decriminalization of hard drugs like crystal meth, fentanyl, heroin and cocaine, with limited access to treatment and recovery.... This is doomed to fail badly.

Almost a year ago there were very specific requirements outlined in the letter of requirements from the federal government to this NDP government with respect to decriminalization. Since then this government has not done the work, but they've pressed forward with decriminalization. No definable metrics, no plan for public safety, complete failure to provide services in rural communities and a very limited access to the treatment that people need when they need it in order to get better.

The Government House Leader prevented the minister from answering this question yesterday, so I'm going to ask it again today. Why is the government allowing decriminalization without ensuring that people can access the treatment that they need in order to get better, and can the minister explain what are the specific baseline metrics and measurements for evaluating the success or the failure of this NDP experiment?

Hon. J. Whiteside: Thank you to the member for the question. I think that in the face of a poisoned drug supply crisis that is killing more than six British Columbians a day, we are compelled to use every single tool in our toolbox to save lives.

[2:40 p.m.]

Decriminalization is one of those tools, amongst a num-

ber of others — a whole continuum of tools that we are using, including massive investments in treatment, in counselling, in recovery opportunities, in safe supply for British Columbians.

We spend over \$2.6 billion in this province on mental health and substance use. We have added to that a \$500 million investment in 2021 to ramp up treatment beds. We've added hundreds of treatment beds. We've doubled child and youth treatment beds. So there is no question that we understand we have to do all of the things in this space to protect and support British Columbians.

With respect to the conditions that Health Canada set down in regard to our application for decriminalization, Health Canada clearly approved our application. The federal government, all of our stakeholders and partners — law enforcement, public health, front-line physicians who provide care for people who use drugs, people with lived experience who have been through what it means to lose family and loved ones to toxic drug poisoning — stood with us as we moved forward to initiate this pilot project, to use one tool in our toolbox to try and protect British Columbians.

We are taking action to expand treatment, to engage with our stakeholders, to scale up Indigenous-led solutions, to conduct public education and outreach, to reduce the stigma and fear associated with drug use so that we can try to ensure that British Columbians can connect to the care and support that they need, and we will continue to do that work.

P. Milobar: Not a day goes by that the members on this side of the House aren't confronted by constituents and family members desperately trying to seek help for their kids and their loved ones and their family, help that just doesn't exist.

Unfortunately, this NDP government insists on burying its head in the sand when it comes to decriminalization of crystal meth, opioids and cocaine. This government wouldn't even acknowledge it in their throne speech, in fact. This government won't acknowledge that it hasn't even met the very specific criteria in the federal exemption letter allowing this experiment to happen, a letter this government agreed to.

One year ago they were supposed to be ensuring that individuals who desire treatment or other supports can access them when needed. It hasn't happened. One year ago they agreed to be putting in place a substance use system of care and meeting the unique needs of specific regions and communities, such as those in rural and remote communities. That hasn't happened. One year ago they agreed that they needed to be educating the public as part of a comprehensive public education plan and engaging with communities. That hasn't happened.

These are directly out of the letters of requirement from the federal government, and one year ago.... It says right here: "Data collection will need to start immediately upon

the granting of the exemption to establish a baseline.” A year ago. This government has had a year that they were supposed to be collecting data for the baseline. That hasn’t happened.

We couldn’t even get an answer out of the ministry yesterday because the House Leader decided to stand up and avoid the question.

Again, why hasn’t the minister met the very specific criteria set out in the federal exemption letter? When will the minister release the baseline data that was supposed to be being collected over this last year?

Hon. J. Whiteside: I have to say that I think that British Columbians looked at the process that we were all collectively engaged in last year through the Health Standing Committee and the support for all of the recommendations in that report by all parties, including decriminalization. I think folks can take some hope that we’re all collectively working together to support British Columbians through what is an absolutely unrelenting public health crisis.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh. Members, please.

[2:45 p.m.]

Hon. J. Whiteside: As we work to do that work and to make the investments — which include new outpatient withdrawal management services in multiple locations in the Interior; new treatment and stabilization beds in Kamloops, Kelowna, Lillooet and Prince George; adding 105 treatment beds; expanding detox beds in the north Island; all of that work — we are very grateful to have the collaboration and cooperation from our partners in health authorities, from front-line providers.

Again, we will continue to do the work, to take action, to ramp up services and make the investments that are necessary.

[End of question period.]

Petitions

J. Rustad: It’s my honour to present a petition signed by 10,845 British Columbians with regards to the Health Professions and Occupations Act. The undersigned allege that “Bill 36, passed by the Legislature, fundamentally alters the relationship between the Ministry of Health and health professionals in British Columbia.”

They further allege that Bill 36 will alter the relationship between licensees and....

Mr. Speaker: Member, you don’t have to read the whole thing. Just present the petition, please.

J. Rustad: I understand that, Mr. Speaker. I’m just about finished.

They also allege that the appropriate bill “to reform the changes in this relationship must involve health professional licensees, their respective colleges and the government in a democratic and meaningfully collaborative way.” Therefore, they request that the Legislative Assembly take steps to repeal this act.

Tabling Documents

Hon. K. Conroy: I have the honour to present the Public Service Benefit Plan Act annual report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2022.

Reports from Committees

SELECTION COMMITTEE

Hon. R. Kahlon: I have the honour to present the first report of the Special Committee of Selection for the fourth session of the 42nd Parliament.

I move that the report be taken as read and received for the first time.

Motion approved.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I ask leave of the House to make a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I move that the report be adopted.

Motion approved.

FINANCE AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES COMMITTEE

J. Routledge: I have the honour to present the third report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for the third session of the 42nd Parliament titled *Annual Review of the Budgets of Statutory Offices*, a copy of which has been deposited with the Office of the Clerk.

I move that the report be taken as read and received.

Motion approved.

J. Routledge: I ask leave of the House to move a motion to adopt the report.

Leave granted.

J. Routledge: I move that the report be adopted, and in doing so, I would like to make some brief remarks.

This report summarizes the committee's recommendations for the budgets of the B.C.'s nine statutory offices for fiscal years 2023-24, 2024-25 and 2025-26.

Last fall the committee members met with each of the statutory officers to examine their budget proposals. In undertaking this review, the committee found that requests for increased funding generally arose from salary increases to align with the recent B.C. General Employees Union settlement, additional staffing related to expanded legislative mandates and new programs and initiatives as well as inflationary pressures.

When considering the office's budget proposals, committee members reflected on the economic challenges and uncertainty facing the province. While the committee continues to support necessary resourcing to ensure officers can fulfil their core mandates, members felt the sustained year-over-year increases in some offices meant that other proposed initiatives could be paused.

Committee members appreciated the efforts made by the offices to find efficiencies in their budget proposals and expect that the offices will continue to demonstrate how they are achieving savings, while continuing to deliver core services.

The committee is grateful to the statutory officers for their continued commitment to serving all British Columbians, and we look forward to meeting with them again in the spring.

[2:50 p.m.]

I also want to acknowledge the staff in the Parliamentary Committees Office who supported the committee. Thank you to Jennifer Arril, Natalie Beaton, Katey Stickle, Mary Heeg, Mary Newell and Jianding Bai.

I appreciate the thoughtful and collaborative work of all committee members and particularly recognize the Deputy Chair, the Member for Kootenay East, for his support.

T. Shypitka: It's my privilege to add some additional comments to the Chair's remarks.

While the annual review of the budgets of statutory offices may seem like a small cog in the big machine, the work done by this committee to review budget proposals from each of the nine statutory offices and to be available to receive financial and operational updates, as well as ongoing supplementary funding requests, is critical to how British Columbia functions. Everything from the monitoring of government programs to ensuring compliance with provincial laws makes up these nine offices.

These offices are highly valued, and the people that work in these offices should be recognized as such. As one would expect, these offices are not immune to the realities we see with other public and private entities. Issues surrounding labour recruitment and retention, higher costs, supply chain issues and technological advancements, just to name a few, are all to be seriously considered when processing these budgets.

The considerations and recommendations made to these budgets, service plans and annual reports for the nine offices went from hundreds of thousands of dollars to tens of millions, so each office was completely unique with its own mandates, challenges and operations. I am proud of the work and the time that was spent with this committee and staff to hold each of these nine offices accountable — and their deliberations and requests.

I would like to thank the Chair, from Burnaby North, for ushering me in as a new Deputy Chair. She made it painless and smooth. I would also like to extend thanks to all my other colleagues on the committee, from Kelowna West, Kelowna-Mission, Vernon-Monashee, Surrey-Cloverdale, Richmond South Centre, Langley East and Vancouver-False Creek.

Lastly, of course, as the Chair pointed out, the incredible staff needs acknowledgment. We all know, as committee members, that the staff that work on these committees are actually the engines that make it work.

To Natalie, Katey, Jianding and the two Marys, thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Members, the question is the report to be adopted.

Motion approved.

Orders of the Day

Hon. R. Kahlon: I call continued debate in response to the throne speech.

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

Throne Speech Debate (continued)

C. Oakes: It truly is an honour to rise as the MLA for Cariboo North and to provide my response to the throne speech.

"Food prices are going up. It's hard to find a doctor. We continue to see mental health and addiction challenges.... Housing costs continue to rise.... People in British Columbia are working harder than ever, but many feel they're just getting by and not getting ahead. People who work hard and play by the rules need someone on their side." Words in this throne speech, I know, constituents in my riding are certainly agreeing with. Where it is questionable is the tagline that this is a government that will "have your back" and will "be there for you."

This is a government that regularly picks winners and losers. They like to talk about equity, but this is the height of hypocrisy at its best, and at the losing end of support from this government are the hard-working people living beyond Hope, British Columbia — a government quick to pick the pockets of people, all while stating they have your

back; an agenda of tax and spend, just not providing services if you don't live in the right area code; policies being put in place that puts rural and northern communities at a significant disadvantage.

[2:55 p.m.]

Having the highest fuel costs in North America disproportionately impacts ridings like mine in a negative way. It is not like, in our communities, we have the same access to transit as, maybe, some of the other communities. We have significant weather challenges. Yes, we do experience minus 40, so heating fuel is not an option....

Deputy Speaker: Sorry, Member. I just was conferring with the Clerk. I believe, earlier, the member might have imputed that the government was doing something illegal. I think the words were "pick the pockets." So if she might rephrase, because I don't think that would be within the standing orders.

C. Oakes: The government continues to tax, regularly, MLAs, and I would say the constituents in Cariboo North feel they've got a little less money in their pockets.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

C. Oakes: I would certainly have to say that.

As I would say, we have recently experienced minus 40, and for people trying to heat their homes, I've certainly heard from many people in my constituency that heating fuel is not an option, but it is a necessity. I know that people in my riding have just recently received their most recent heating bills, and between the layering of taxes and the delivery fees, this is an extraordinarily challenging time for constituents in my riding. They do want a government that has their back, and they do want a government that understands the unique challenges that many British Columbians are facing.

I've especially heard from seniors right now that are struggling. We have, from this NDP government in this throne speech, a government that takes victory laps over and over again, a government talking about the same priorities for the sixth year in a row, but the results just keep getting worse. A government's approach of the cumulative layering of 20 new and/or increased taxes.... Again, folks in the Cariboo don't feel like they're getting more money in their pockets.

Legislation creates an uncertain business climate that is consistently driving investment elsewhere. Government decisions are resulting in an exodus of highly skilled workers to Alberta and other jurisdictions. Health care workers certainly, under this government, do not feel that this is a government that has their back.

When people are struggling the most, when the exhaustion and the frustration is at its pinnacle, the NDP government resorts to repeating victory laps, press releases and statements, even today in this Legislature,

on what a great job they're doing and how everything is great when it comes to health care. I can tell you this is putting a mental strain on the very people this government should be there for.

The NDP is doubling the total provincial debt per person by 2024 to more than \$16,500 for every man, woman and child — a legacy our children and our grandchildren will inherit, a legacy that's not okay.

The riding of Cariboo North is larger than Vancouver Island, and I'm proud to be the fourth generation raised in this spectacular part of the province. Our riding is proud of our entrepreneurial spirit, its rich natural resource sectors that provide good, paying, family-supporting jobs. The people of my riding are resilient. They take care of their neighbours and their community. They pay their taxes. They do not ask for a lot from government, but they do hope. They hope that if a loved one gets sick, they'll be able to access health care.

This throne speech had no plan to address the crisis in our health care system. Just today, I heard from one of my constituents, named Blaine. Blaine is a young guy who owns a business in our community. He has had, recently, three strokes, and he's had an impossible time finding a family doctor, like so many British Columbians across this province.

[3:00 p.m.]

He told me that he went to the walk-in clinic, and there was a sign on the door stating that it's permanently closed. Then he called the urgent and primary care on Monday and was told that there won't be a doctor there until Saturday. How does this explain the response that we repeatedly hear from this government — that everything is great, that there is access for everyone in health care? We've got these great centres that are open across British Columbia, just not in our communities. The people of the Cariboo are frustrated. They're angry.

Another constituent, Tim, contacted my office recently. Tim was diagnosed with cancer and started receiving treatments in May of 2022. His oncologist went on holidays in December and will not be back until March of 2023. This has left him without an oncologist at a very difficult time. They've sent in their paperwork to the Provincial Health Authority, and now Tim has to travel to Kelowna from Quesnel to see an oncologist. Is that good enough?

The Minister of Health talked today about how great this government is doing around diagnostic imaging and how everything is working great. Record opportunities for meeting the health care needs of British Columbia as well. I learned some pretty tragic news over the holidays, three separate incidences of people in my community who have been trying to access health care. They don't have a family doctor and now have received absolutely terrible, life-altering news that they have late-stage cancer, and now it's terminal. This is simply not good enough.

This throne speech did nothing to address the crisis that

our communities are facing. Why does the North not have a PET scan for cancer diagnosis? Why is Northern Health the only health authority without a cardiac unit? Why is it that people of the North have to travel down to the Lower Mainland at their own expense to make sure that they access health care? With all the revenues that come out of the North, why do we not have access to the same kind of services that other health authorities have?

Government is quick to tax and take money from people living in the Cariboo, money from the natural resource sector, all while they keep changing the goalposts for these sectors, creating uncertainty, eroding any competitive advantage that we may have once had. Look, I would remind members of the House that these are good-paying, family-supporting jobs, and we are seeing an erosion in rural British Columbia of these foundational sectors that have helped build this province.

Where is the equity from this NDP government for people living north of Hope? Where is the support for the families and individuals trying to access treatment and recovery support for their loved ones that may suffer from mental health or addiction diseases? How can a government continue to brag about how much progress they're making when there's such a limited level of support for people living in rural and northern British Columbia?

Look, I've had to sit with the families, and many have multiple mortgages on their houses, as they desperately try and seek treatment for people that they love. It shouldn't happen in a province like British Columbia. Wait-lists, months, if you can even get access to treatment. It's not good enough. No one can look around and say that the current approach taken by this government is working.

I want to contrast this for a moment and say that on this side of the House, we feel that better is possible. I'm proud that our party has put forward a plan to overhaul the delivery of mental health services and to build a recovery-oriented system of care for those suffering from addiction. We would eliminate user fees. We would build regional recovery communities. That includes in the North. The status quo is not working, and doing more of the same is not going to drive better results for anyone.

[3:05 p.m.]

One of the other things this side of the House has put forward.... I think it's important, as the opposition, that we hold the government to account, but we also put forward really thoughtful, compassionate ideas, ideas we know can make a real difference in the lives of British Columbians. We endorsed the plan proposed by Dr. Julian Somers and Simon Fraser University in July 2021 providing an effective roadmap to address street homelessness, with a focus on evidence-based services, partnerships with Indigenous organizations and a highly effective model of person-centered services. That's leadership. Those are steps that we've put forward to this government.

We also believe, on this side of the House, that it's critically important to look at awareness and prevention. Cre-

ating and delivering youth-focused public education campaigns about addiction and recovery; establishing workplace campaigns to assist employers in recognizing substance use disorders; and better supporting employees in recovery are the right things to do. We believe in creating programs to support families struggling with addiction recovery system navigation and having general questions and supports for impacted family members. We feel that this is leadership.

We also understand very clearly that there need to be established detailed data systems to track provincewide performance measures and targets with clear benchmarks, the number of publicly funded mental health and addiction treatment beds available to British Columbia. This will measure performance outcomes and ensure standardization of care. This is leadership, something that this throne speech is desperately lacking.

This throne speech mentioned very little about the natural resource sector. It did say that the mining sector is booming in British Columbia. Well, again, in the riding of Cariboo North, there is so much opportunity when it comes to mining. What the throne speech does not outline is how terrible this government is at actually getting permits out the door.

I recently talked to Ross, a placer miner, who's waited 18 months to get his permit through. How, as a small business owner, are you supposed to be able to support yourself and pay the taxes and do all the things that are necessary if it actually takes you 18 months to get a permit?

I would remind the members of this House that we have limited ability to actually work, because of our weather. There are critical points in the Cariboo where work absolutely needs to be completed. When you're seeing permits that get moved long into the summer, when critical work needs to happen, that has an impact on small business owners in our community.

There are some large mine projects that we feel are huge opportunities not just for people living in our region, our Indigenous First Nations communities, but in fact, for all of British Columbia. Quite frankly, we need these jobs. The Cariboo is one of the most forest-dependent regions in North America. Under the NDP government, since 2019, I think we've experienced 29 definite/indefinite curtailments of mills.

First, this government said, in the 2017 election.... I remember that day when the Premier stood up and said: "First order of business is I will go down to Washington, and I will deliver the softwood lumber deal for British Columbians. I can make that happen. Under an NDP government, we wouldn't see mills close, because we've got people's backs. We've got workers' backs." Well, look. Every single time there's a curtailment or challenges in our rural communities, the government comes forward with this press release: "We've got your back. We'll be there for you."

Where's the support for the logging contractors, logging contractors like Blaine, who was mentioned earlier

today in question period? Business owners can have pieces of equipment that range from \$600,000 to \$1 million-plus. They cannot afford to operate under this legislative and economic model that consistently creates uncertainty, where the goalposts consistently change and when they have a government that treats them as their own personal — I'll probably get in trouble here — piggy bank, as they find new ways to tax, taxes such as the employer health tax.

This budget did mention the importance of the movement of goods and services across the province. We certainly feel the impacts when there are significant climate events that challenge the transportation network in British Columbia.

[3:10 p.m.]

I would like to take a moment to invite all members of this House, specifically the Minister of Transportation, to come and travel to the Cariboo. Over the past few years.... One year we saw 150 roads impacted, the next, 200 different roads that had been significantly impacted. Where is the investment that is critical to making sure that the transportation network remains viable?

I'd like to invite members of this Legislature to come and drive with me across the potholes that exist on the Quesnel River Bridge and rail overpass. The damage that is currently on that bridge is no longer a matter of just damage to vehicles. I'm raising in this Legislature today that it's a public safety concern. And I fear that there will be an accident on that bridge one day because of the significant damage and the collapsing nature of the pavement on that bridge that's going to cost somebody their life.

This government came in a few years ago and said, "Look, we're going to have shovels in the ground," yet we continue to wait. Another press release by this government with no results.

Another important bridge, which I want to raise in this House, is the Johnston Bridge. This is the backup bridge to the Quesnel River Bridge, if something ever happens.

Again, I know that the government thinks that this is a piece of infrastructure that's just for Quesnel and its residents. I would remind this House that the Quesnel River Bridge is a critical piece of the movement of goods and services to the North. If something happens with that bridge and that bridge goes down or is impacted or is closed, it stops the movement of goods and services to the North.

UNBC did a study, I think it was last year, that talked about.... Any closure of Highway 97 up to the North means we've got about four days' worth of food in our grocery stores. So it is a significant concern that we should all be paying attention to.

What is the backup if something happens with the Quesnel River Bridge and the overpass? Well, the backup is the Johnston Bridge, which, for residents living in the community of Quesnel and the province.... The responsibility for that bridge.... Yes, it's a municipal bridge, but I would say it is time now.... With such a critical piece of

infrastructure that connects the North, the movement of goods and services, it's time that this government comes to the table and provides the support for the improvements that are necessary on the Johnston Bridge.

The restrictions that are currently on the Johnston Bridge mean industrial traffic has to go on Maple Drive. That means you can have up to 80 industrial vehicles going to a plywood plant and that go by a middle school, a day-care, an elementary school. You've got kids that are walking on very narrow sidewalks with industrial traffic.

Again, I'm raising in this Legislature that I'm really concerned that we could have a serious accident. This government needs to come to the table and work with our local government.

This throne speech, I will say, talked about the importance of working with local government. I came from local government, as many members of this Legislature did. I have profound respect for the work that is being done by local governments and regional districts right across this province.

Support for resource-based communities that are being hit is significantly important right now. When a mill closes in a community like mine or a community.... I could go through lists of where we've seen significant challenges, where local government is significantly challenged by trying to replace that tax base. It has very real consequences on people. So I encourage the government to reach out and work with local governments on that.

[3:15 p.m.]

The throne speech did mention that they have a plan for high-speed Internet to every community across the province. I think this is critically important. I would remind members of this House that the Auditor General released a report that highlighted that 60 percent of rural remote communities do not have basic connectivity. That puts us, in rural and northern communities, at a significant disadvantage. I really hope that what was put in this throne speech becomes a reality, that the NDP actually delivers real results and outcomes on this front, not just more press releases.

I want to spend a few minutes talking about training. Of course, I am extraordinarily proud to serve as the shadow minister for Post-Secondary Education. We all know how critically important it is to the economic, social health of the province of British Columbia that we make sure we get that right. I want to raise the huge opportunity — I see my shadow minister of Agriculture is here — that the vet school at UNBC is a critical piece.... While it didn't make it into the throne speech, it is certainly my hope that it will find its way into the budget, because we certainly know how critically important that program is for all of British Columbia.

Another critical piece of investment, some training we've seen cut.... I hope this government finds a path forward. It is really discouraging that in the Minister of Post-Secondary Education's own backyard, we're seeing the sign

language interpretive program being cut. I think that does not speak well for a government that talks about accessibility and making sure they're focused on inclusion when the Minister of Post-Secondary Education, in her own riding.... The program that was the only program in western Canada is now being cut. I think that's not good enough, and I think the minister needs to step up and provide some leadership on that.

Some of the other opportunities.... Each year MLAs in the North have the opportunity to meet with all of our school board trustees. I think that's a really important piece because we get together, and it's those opportunities where partisanship is parked at the door and we just talk about how we can really make a difference around education in our communities.

One of the things that consistently comes out year after year is the challenge that northern communities.... Not just in education and health care but, in fact, all sectors, the challenge is around recruitment and retention in our communities. It is a significant challenge.

I believe and I know for sure that when we can invest in training in our communities, that is a critical piece in helping us retain professionals in rural and northern communities. So it is my hope that while, certainly, we didn't see much in the throne speech, I am hopeful that in the budget we will see an opportunity to provide real training in communities right across the province but specifically in those communities that are struggling with recruitment and retention, because it's hard. It's hard to attract critical, needed professionals in our communities.

I guess perhaps, just maybe in closing, I want to say that I am truly grateful for having such extraordinary staff and support both in my constituency office back home and here in the legislative precinct. Boy, we are all blessed to have some extraordinary people. Sometimes we forget, as the politics rage here, how important these people are, and I just want to sincerely say thank you for all of the help and the assistance that you provide.

I know that constituents are extraordinarily well served coming into my constituency office. We lead from our heart. Many days there are a lot of tears that are shared. It's a difficult job working in our constituency offices, and I certainly acknowledge and know that, and I just want to say thank you to my team and my staff.

I also want to thank all of the people, the stakeholders, that have consistently stepped up and provided so much support, especially the students. Please know how much your thoughtful, enthusiastic support and ideas mean.

Often in this place, it's pretty negative. You know, that's the nature of this business sometimes. I am an optimist, so having the opportunity to meet with students who have lots of great ideas.... I just again want to say thank you for that.

[3:20 p.m.]

Finally, I've got some incredible mentors. To the Indi-

genous Elders that are always there to provide support, I really do appreciate that.

In closing, to our knowledge-keepers and our Elders right across our communities in the province, thank you. This province is a fantastic place to live, and we are very blessed. I'm reminded and grateful every single day that there are some extraordinary people that work hard every day.

In closing, please don't forget about rural and northern B.C. I know that we're a long way from Victoria, and sometimes it certainly feels like that. I know my constituents feel forgotten, and they're frustrated. They're worried, like all British Columbians. It just sometimes seems just a little bit harder to access services of government in our communities, so I will continue to be an advocate for our rural communities.

With that, I close my remarks.

M. Dykeman: It is a true privilege to rise in the House today to have the opportunity to speak in support of the Speech from the Throne. It really is such an honour to serve as the MLA for Langley East. I'm so fortunate every day to be able to represent such a fantastic community, a community that resides on the traditional territories of the Kwantlen, Katzie, Matsqui and Semiahmoo First Nations, a diverse community.

The riding I represent starts at 0 Avenue. It's a little narrower at that point. It goes from 216th to 248th and then goes up to 72nd and then goes wide, from Surrey to Abbotsford to the Fraser River. So it covers a very geographically large space, and it's a mix of very fast-growing urban area and rural, lots of farms, and we hear from a wide range of constituents in our office. It's a community that is, I believe, one of the very fastest-growing in British Columbia and certainly one of the fastest-growing in the Fraser Valley.

We actually received some numbers recently. Our community, the township of Langley, has seen a very rapid growth in immigrant populations. Between 2001 and 2021, the population has actually doubled, an increase of 124 percent for the township. Our community is truly growing and changing and becoming so diverse and, obviously, is enriched from those changes.

We have a very dedicated volunteer population, people who have lived in our community, who have farmed for multi generations. One of the oldest farms there has been there for, I believe, over 100 years. As I think about the throne speech in that context, I really think about Langley being one of those communities that's seeing change and hearing from people about the priorities set out in it.

Before I go on about that part, though, I just very quickly, so I don't forget, want to thank the folks who make me look good every day and allow me to do my job. I'd like to take an opportunity to thank my two constituency assistants, Candy and Carly. Truly, without them, I probably wouldn't even make it here every Sunday. They

ensure that I have everything I need. They remind me of the things that I need to do.

Themselves, they're very involved in our community. Candy is the newly elected chair of the Langley board of education and volunteers and gives her time. Carly has been in our community for so long, an amazing volunteer, an amazing person who works hard every day to improve the township of Langley. I'm very, very blessed to have them in my life, working every day in the office.

[3:25 p.m.]

I also want to take a very quick shout-out to two of my interns, Emilio and Justin, who have been working in our office over the last year and have come in and taken on so many tasks. I don't, by any stretch of the imagination, consider myself old, but I feel like technology is going faster than my ability to take up the knowledge. Things like TikTok and stuff like that. I mean, I know how to scroll through the videos, but I don't understand anything about it.

They're bringing a perspective and information to our office from a youth perspective, which is so important. These are people who are in university, who are future leaders, and they're in there sharing what they're hearing. I learn far more from them each day than I'm sure I provide to them. I'm very fortunate to have such a dedicated group of people around me.

I also would like to thank the people in this building. We are so fortunate to have such amazing people that work here every day, from our LAs — Andrew, another person who spends a lot of time following me around and making sure I have whatever I forgot about; and Patrick in our office, another person who keeps us organized every day.

I'd also like to say thank you to the MAs in the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. I'm very honoured to recently have been appointed as Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits, following very big shoes to fill with our new Attorney General, Minister Sharma, who we're so very, very lucky to have in that role. I'd like to say thank you to Hasham and Samuel for being so patient as I transition into that role and making sure that I have everything that I need. We are so fortunate....

Deputy Speaker: Of course, Member, we don't mention members' names. Thank you.

M. Dykeman: True. Yes. Sorry about that.

Quickly, I would like to thank my family. We spend a lot of time going away, being on the road, serving in different events, attending different volunteer functions. Really, at the end of the day, they are the people who are holding things together at home.

I'd like to just thank my father and my two children, A.J. and Mac, and my very dear friend Cassandra, who make sure the farm is okay. She's definitely family, been with us for so many years. I'd like to thank them for

allowing me to do this work because really we're a family. We have to support each other. Without their support, this wouldn't be possible. So I just wanted to thank them for all that they do.

Back to our role here. I very quickly want to say also, in addition to the wonderful people that work here, one of the things that I think we don't recognize enough about how amazing this government is, is we are a majority female caucus with a majority female cabinet. That's something that we need to continue to celebrate in this building and to be able....

I stand on the shoulders of the people who came before me, the women who really plowed the field to make it so that women could be elected and be in this House. Now here we are really making monumental change and coming together and have major things to celebrate. I just wanted to remind everybody of that again, because it is such a historic thing.

As I was saying earlier, my riding is really diverse. What I hear from people who are constituents of my riding is exactly what is reflected in this throne speech: stable, secure, stronger and more sustainable British Columbia.

People want to know that they have help with costs — things are expensive right now; that we are making changes to deal with the housing crisis, something that is on the forefront of people's minds; that we have a plan for health care; that we are focused on our communities being safer. Those are the things that I hear every day from our constituents.

I'm thrilled to be able to speak in support of a speech that takes those priorities and puts them at the forefront. When I think about those, I was thinking about some of the investments that have been made recently in Langley East, the riding I represent. When we talk about building a stronger future and making investments in our future, I don't think that there's anything more poignant than our \$10-a-day child care spaces.

[3:30 p.m.]

We just, at the end of January, were so thrilled in our community to hear that Donna Gabriel Robins YMCA Child Care and Kids Club in Langley is becoming a \$10-a-day child care site. That means that nearly 100 more families in Langley are benefiting from those \$10-a-day child care spaces, which allow parents to be able to pursue more career choices and educational opportunities. It gives children a space in their school.

These fees being reduced provide more money in the pockets for families to be able to lower their costs and make life more affordable every day. That's something that really makes a measurable difference in the lives of young families.

In my riding, as I mentioned, with people moving, we are seeing a lot of young families. We're seeing a lot of growth in an area.... We're feeling those pressures with schools and all the investments that need to be made.

That's a good-news story. We should be celebrating the fact that we have families moving to British Columbia.

We have people raising children. We live in a beautiful province. People want to move here. They want to be able to come to our community and live. I was so fortunate to be able to raise my two children in Langley, and I can understand why people would want to move there.

Another example of that is helping people by tackling the housing crisis, by building houses that are affordable for families. We had two recent announcements. One was Jennie Gagliardi Place, which provided 98 new homes in the township of Langley. Our province provided \$10.7 million to this project through the Building B.C. fund, the community housing fund. This was a partnership with the Christian Life Assembly Housing Society. It provided the land, and the township of Langley also contributed. Those 98 units provide valuable affordable housing in our community for a wide range of individuals, including families and seniors.

We also had another affordable home for seniors that was also a partnership that was built in Langley, which provided an 82-unit townhouse in an apartment complex for seniors and families. That provided safe, secure and affordable rental home construction for families.

[J. Tegart in the chair.]

That was a partnership between the province, Catalyst Community Developments Society and the Shepherd of the Valley Lutheran Church, which has the Langley Housing Society. I had the opportunity to tour that recently and hear from some of the people that were in there. They talked about what a difference it made for them.

It really was a wonderful thing to see and hear about how these investments made a difference in the lives of people in our community, and they were so happy. The family housing has many young children in it. It's close to schools and in a wonderful community. It's an investment that really.... Right there, you can see that those differences are being made for people in our community, and it's something that I know our community is very grateful for.

Our province.... The investments we're making have made a difference. We've seen an over 10 percent increase in rental housing. It's not something that you're going to see immediately, but we are seeing the benefits of those investments and will continue to.

I'm grateful that the Speech from the Throne talks about making these stable, secure investments. We can't control forces, but what we can do is create programs and supports that help address them and make the lives of people in British Columbia better by those actions.

Another one that I saw in the speech was making our communities safer, actions that help address challenges that our communities are facing. I had the opportunity to go on a ride-along the other day with Const. Peter Mann

in our community. We have an incredible relationship, in the township of Langley, with the RCMP.

[3:35 p.m.]

When I was on school board, I really admired the relationships the RCMP formed with their youth outreach teams, which are still in place. Julie Bion, who heads it up, is so committed to creating positive relationships with youth. She said something which really resonated with me when I was chair. She said that if our first interaction with youth is positive and we can build relationships, then youth see the ability to go to people in our community offices and our community as a way of getting out of trouble, instead of a way to get into trouble, and have cultivated that. They have volleyball games and do really wonderful things to build relationships with youth.

We have a school in Langley called Vanguard, and it's a school that really deals with some very challenging situations. The RCMP always come and walk the students on stage. If you go to that grad, there is no way that you will leave without crying. It is one of the most emotional and wonderful schools I've ever been in. The relationship with the RCMP is very special.

On this ride-along with Constable Mann, we were talking about challenges faced within the community. Those challenges that were coming up were the ones we hear every day. We hear about mental health. We hear about the need to have those supports. As I was reading through the Speech from the Throne and thinking about some of the investments our government's made, that is what's important to keep at the forefront. Those investments in mental health are what are so vastly needed and what we're working on. Police, and then the mental health, offer supports.

We're dealing with complex situations in which the investments that are being made get to the core. They help reduce stigma. They help address the challenges that we're facing. Seeing a commitment to that — a commitment to addressing mental health, coupled with the changes that are needed to make our communities safer — is something that once again offers us stable, secure and a stronger and more sustainable British Columbia. We're headed onto that path because of those investments, working with investments where they're needed. Those take time. As we're seeing those come to fruition, we're seeing that it's making the lives of British Columbians much better.

Of course, with the heat dome and the atmospheric river, fighting climate change and building an economy for everyone through a sustainable green approach is so important. We saw last year how challenging that was. We have made several investments recently as a government. In Langley East, for instance, there is the Anderson Creek floodplain mapping and Salmon River bank stabilization.

That investment, the community emergency preparedness fund, was a total of \$23.4 million and supports communities to better prepare for, mitigate and respond to climate-related emergencies like floods and extreme temperatures. That helps get ahead of the challenges that come

from climate change and are important investments. The Anderson Creek floodplain mapping and Salmon River bank stabilization received funding for \$890,000. It helps plan. It helps land use planning, risk assessments and risk mapping.

Those are investments which are so important to ensure that we have things in place that are sort of forward planning, so that we don't deal with another emergency and that we're able to better secure the areas and address the needs as our climate changes. That's another investment that I was thinking about as I was listening to those five priorities that were laid out in the throne speech and are so important.

I wanted to also, as we were talking about climate change and housing investments, take a moment to recognize, as I was saying earlier, that there was a recent election. We have a new mayor and council. We have Mayor Eric Woodward and several new councillors on there who are working very hard to ensure that we have housing for our fast-growing community. We've had wonderful conversations. The Housing Minister and myself recently visited and were talking about the growth in our area.

[3:40 p.m.]

I want to take a second to acknowledge how hard the mayor and council are working to plan and be proactive in ensuring that people have access to housing and other resources. I wanted to congratulate everybody that has joined the council that's new, and those that were re-elected, to say thank you to the mayor and council for the excellent relationship that that we have and that we're looking forward to working with him, through my office, as our community grows.

As I mentioned, we've had some wonderful investments in Langley East, and I am thrilled to be speaking in support of the Speech from the Throne and really excited to see how these actions and these commitments roll out over the next little bit.

I really want to say that it's a stark contrast to before I was elected. Like I said, I was a school board chair. When I think back, about the fire sale of school properties and, basically, starving the health care system and the dumpster fire that ICBC was, I have to say that this Speech from the Throne talking about a stable, secure, stronger and more sustainable British Columbia is something that I truly am honoured to stand up and speak about.

We can't control those global forces, as the speech said, but we can respond in a measured and strategic way. We can put people first. We can make priorities that are forward-thinking. We can take this year's surplus and put it to work for people in British Columbia. That will be done, as the speech said, by reducing costs for families; by growing our health care workforce; by building more homes for people; by giving record support to cities and regions, rural and urban, as they grow quickly; by fighting climate change.

As I've seen from the investments that have been made

in our community, those choices are paying off. Those choices are making our community more sustainable, making the costs for people in our community go down, providing more opportunities for people to see their cost of living reduced. I agree; we shouldn't be pulling back.

We should be investing and ensuring that people have the services that they need; that they have opportunities, like I said, for \$10-a-day daycare; that we are looking at the future and making sure that we're putting the investments into climate change mitigation; that we have houses that are being built for people, seniors, young families; that we're welcoming new people to our community; and that we provide services and housing options for the people that we're welcoming as our population is growing.

I agree with one sentence in there that talks about it: "In a chaotic world, B.C. is doing things differently." I really believe that this Speech from the Throne demonstrates that, that this is a multifaceted approach that is looking at the wide range of challenges that are being seen around the world, but that we are taking those challenges and we're coming up with measurable, sustainable and wise investments for the people of British Columbia.

I know that I'm seeing that in Langley East, and I know that the constituents that I talk to in my community are seeing that and are thankful for the investments that are coming into our community. I'm looking forward to continuing the good work that we're doing, grateful that we have this opportunity to invest back in to our community to make sure the lives of people in British Columbia continue to be improved, as they have been, and grateful that we have such an exciting Speech from the Throne.

I want to thank you, Hon. Speaker, for the opportunity to stand up and speak to it. With that, I will take my seat.

Deputy Speaker: Recognizing the member for Surrey–White Rock.

T. Halford: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and welcome to the chair.

I welcome those on House duty and some of those new to House duty.

Anyway, I find it a privilege and an honour to get up and speak any time in this House, whether it's on a bill, on the Speech from the Throne or on question period. I spent a lot of time in this building prior to being elected, and every time I come in here, I pinch myself, because it is such a privilege to work in here, and it's such an added privilege to represent a community, which we all do.

[3:45 p.m.]

There are 87 of us collectively. It's not lost on me, the responsibility that that bears. When somebody comes into your office, whether they supported you or they didn't, the responsibility that you have to do your level best to make sure that their life is better when they leave that office.

With that, I do want to thank the people that work in my office, Effie and Jacob. I'm sure they're watching cap-

tively right now. Two individuals that have.... Jacob is new to the office. He just came over from the South Surrey and White Rock Chamber. But Effie has been with me since day one, and without Effie I would not be able to function the way I do. So I want to give a very special shout-out to her. She really is the rock in our office, and I probably don't say that enough.

I also want to take this opportunity to just briefly touch on my family. Like for many members here, they're what allows me to do this job every single day — most notably my wife, Holly. My wife probably gives back more to the community than I do because she actually employs a number of people in the community that I represent. She's a child care provider. She's actually working hard to set up a child care right now. She's putting in 12-, 14-, 16-hour days, she's employing dozens of people, and she's making a difference every single day.

I see the work that she puts in, the pride that she puts in, the lives that she and her staff change, every single day, and it makes me proud. The fact is that when I come over here and I travel, she's doing all this work on her own. She has got support, but it falls on her to get the kids to school, to get the kids to sports, to get the kids into their tutoring or to dance, all while she's trying to carve out a path on her own.

I think that's something that is sometimes overlooked. In my case, it's something that she reminds me of every single day. I'm grateful for that because it's so important.

To my kids, Ben, Nicolas and Sasha.... Again, there are a lot of parents, grandparents, guardians and providers in this House that make those sacrifices every single day. Last week was our first week before we came in. I was in Vancouver for a series of meetings, and I wasn't home at night. On Friday, I picked up Sasha, and she said, "Dad, you didn't do my homework with me, and I got five out of 12 on spelling." So we made a deal right there that that would not happen again.

You know, what I do.... We carve out time every single night to make sure that at seven o'clock, dad is doing spelling. The beauty part is that she can't actually see me googling the words to make sure I've got them correctly before we go through and give her a test. But I am very confident that Sasha will get 12 out of 12 coming up on Friday. If she doesn't, it will be my fault. That's okay, as it should be.

Coming from the riding that I do — I'm sure everybody says their riding is special and unique, and it is; every riding is special and unique — being able to represent two municipalities in White Rock and in Surrey, I think, is very special.

I know there are many of us that represent numerous municipalities, but it's an area that I grew up in, and it's an area that my entire family grew up in, all 45 of us. My mom still operates a small business in that area, just down the street from my constit office and the curling club. Like I

said, my wife owns and operates a child care. My dad owns and operates a small business in the riding.

I can see, firsthand, the struggles that people are in right now. Whether it's affordability, health care or mental health, I think people are finding it incredibly challenging to be in such a beautiful province but to face such difficult times.

[3:50 p.m.]

I'll speak on affordability for a second, because I think that that's such an important aspect of what we do. I think when people come in....

[Interruption.]

As I was saying, when it comes to affordability, I think that's something that every single member is hearing about when it comes into their office. I think about the challenges that I've heard from parents when they're coming into the office and saying: "I can't afford my child's tutor this semester for math. Can you help?" "I can't afford the counselling sessions that I'm going through with my spouse right now, and it's really important that we get these sessions because that's what's holding our family together. Can you help?" "I can't afford my rent, and I'm on a fixed income. I'm a senior. Can you help?"

We have an obligation to help. I think, being in opposition, that we have to highlight areas that we think are being underserved by this government. There is a host of those areas that my colleagues have canvassed, and I will continue to canvass. That's our job to do.

I think one of the troubling parts is.... I hear this every single time that I go somewhere for an event or an announcement: "I voted NDP, but they've let me down." I hear that not just in my riding, but I hear that across the Lower Mainland where it says: "I voted NDP because I thought I was going to get a renters rebate, and I didn't."

Maybe the Minister of Labour has heard these tales at Laura's Coffee, where I've seen him once or twice. Or maybe not. But I'm hearing them, and I'm hearing them across the spectrum. I heard them when I door-knocked with my colleague in Surrey South when she won that by-election. She probably sits here today. We heard the concerns that they felt let down. Promises were made, and they were not kept.

I'll give an example. I think one of the things that I'm so proud of is that in White Rock and South Surrey and the riding that I represent, we have the Peace Arch Hospital Foundation. I'm sure a number of you guys are very familiar with your individual hospital foundations and the work they do. The Peace Arch Hospital Foundation does incredible work. I was able to do a tour of Peace Arch Hospital. My kids were born at Peace Arch. It's a hospital I'm very familiar with.

We did a tour, and the doctor that was leading the tour said, "I need you to see this," and he opened up a room. It was a beautiful room. It was quite large, maybe not as....

Actually, probably very similar to the size of the room that we're standing in right now. It had rooms. It had beds. It had a waiting area. It was the mental health facility that was built in Peace Arch Hospital. It was a facility that has been planned for, I think, close to seven years, but that facility was largely funded by donors.

[3:55 p.m.]

The Surrey firefighters did fundraising for that facility. The White Rock firefighters did fundraising for that facility. The White Rock RCMP did fundraising for that facility. I can't tell you the level of disappointment when they wanted to see what their work had become and that it's completely empty. It's locked. Not one single person has been seen in that facility, and it's been open for.... Well, it hasn't been open, but it has been ready for a number of months now, going back to the early fall.

Here we have a brand-new mental health and substance abuse facility sitting in Peace Arch Hospital, and it's locked shut because you can't get staff. What happens is if you're having a mental health crisis, you go through emergency.

What we heard from a number of people — I've heard this, I know my colleague from Surrey South has heard this as well, and I'm sure that other members have heard it — is when you're having a severe mental health issue, to then have to go through emergency, sometimes with a member of law enforcement, and how that compounds the anxiety that one goes through and the challenges that that brings on.... And a mere 40 feet away, 40 feet from that emergency department, is a facility that, as I said, is probably not much smaller than this room that is locked shut, fundraised by individuals in my community. I find that unacceptable.

When we talk about mental health.... I know mental health was mentioned in the throne speech, but what wasn't mentioned is the lack of outcomes when it comes to not knowing how many beds are vacant, what the wait-lists are, how many people are trying to access treatment, what the costs are. How do you solve a problem when you don't even know where you are?

I'm proud to be part of a team that stood forward last week and tried to solve that problem with a meaningful announcement, with an idea to make people's lives better. I think that that's a good start.

We talk about the issues that were mentioned today, earlier, and that one in five British Columbians don't have a family doctor. A number of those British Columbians, almost one million.... A number of them reside in my riding. A number of them are seniors. A number of them have very complex health issues, and they've relied on a family doctor for that guidance for their prescriptions.

A number of those seniors are waking up at early hours, taking the bus and standing outside walk-in clinics in the hopes that they will be able to see a doctor that is very unfamiliar with their background, with some of their issues, their ailments, their prescriptions, and that's a challenge.

I will say that when I was listening to the throne speech, I heard one member call it boring. It was a government member, I think, that called it boring or lacking or something. I don't want to give the wrong word. But it was.... I agree, but I don't even know if I heard the word "senior" in it once. My riding represents a fair number of seniors, and there wasn't a lot of talk of seniors in the throne speech, if at all.

One of the major challenges that seniors are going through right now is mental health supports. And a number of seniors in my riding are on very, very fixed incomes, and affordability is a big challenge for them. They were counting on that renters rebate that was twice promised and that this government twice failed to deliver on. I find that to be disingenuous.

[4:00 p.m.]

When we talk about issues and talk about anxiety, I think one of the number one jobs of government is not to add to that anxiety. I think we saw that in spades this previous year, when this government continued to go down the path of defunding families with autistic children. I know that the Premier made a statement, just post his swearing in, that he was changing course, but we have still seen examples of how that model is functioning in areas like Kelowna, which my colleague resides in.

It gives these parents extreme skepticism that the words of the Premier were done in good faith. I think that is something that we grapple with every day. Every parent grapples with it, especially when they have a child with special needs, especially when they are hopeful that the government understands. You should not have to go out.... Parents go out in the pouring rain and protest at the Premier's office about funding that their children depend on and that their family depends on.

I think, with the throne speech and the way that this government has set out its agenda, it almost seems like the title of it should have been: "It's somebody else's fault." Six years in government — a two-term government — but it's somebody else's fault. I think that's where they're losing the public. I think that's where they're losing the people that have depended on this government — in terms of: "It's somebody else's fault."

Can't get access to treatment? "It's somebody else's fault." Can't get a family doctor? "It's somebody else's fault." Can't afford your groceries, pay your rent, or meet your mortgage commitments? "It's somebody else's fault." I think that that's going to be part of the challenge that this government continues to face, because I think the public have wised up to that and said: "You know what? A two-term government needs to accept responsibility." We've seen that day in and day out, whether we're in this House or outside of it. People are tired of hearing that it's somebody else's fault.

One of the challenges that we continue to see every single day, specifically in the Lower Mainland, is in regard to transportation. I live in an area just outside the

border of White Rock. We've got, I would say, probably a few thousand people in my neighbourhood. There's no bus service.

It's a community that has been built up in six years. You have to cross two highways in order to get to any public form of transportation. You have to go down 8th Avenue, cross King George Highway and cross Highway 99, and there's one bus stop right by what was formerly known as the Pink Palace, along King George Highway and just off 8th Avenue.

One of the challenges we hear from parents is saying: "Our child can't get to work. Our child can't get to university." We've got a lot of new Canadians that have moved into that area, and they can't get to their work. They can't get to their university. They can't get to their appointments.

[4:05 p.m.]

I think one of the other challenging things that we face, too, is that this is a government that cancelled a bridge that should have been opened by now. People should be.... It's almost four o'clock right now. If the Minister of Transportation were to drive through the Massey Tunnel right now, I wonder what that would look like.

If the Minister of Transportation were driving down Highway 99 right at this moment, at five after four.... It's past four o'clock, so three lanes would probably be open. The counterflow would be open, but you would still be jammed probably, I would guess, back to around the Oak Street Bridge, adding at least half an hour on to your commute. At this very moment, right now, people are stuck in their cars trying to get through the Massey Tunnel. At this very moment, right now, that bridge should be open.

This is a government that said they know better. Let's scrap the almost \$100 million that went into it, and we'll put an unpermitted tunnel in there, at a date to be determined later. That's the NDP transportation plan. A bridge was designed to have rapid access, that could have gone all the way out to South Surrey. Instead, we'll take \$100 million of taxpayers' money. We'll scrap that, and we'll try and figure out how we're going to do a tunnel.

When we do that tunnel, for the people that are sitting in their cars right now, that are bumper to bumper.... How many lanes are going to be open, going across, with that new tunnel? There are three right now with the counterflow in. It'll be three. That's the NDP transportation plan: three lanes. Their delayed tunnel, which will likely be over budget and over time: three lanes.

The people that are stuck right now, bumper to bumper, on Highway 99, going through, have access to three lanes. And the Transportation Minister's plan? We'll do three lanes.

I think that's the rationale that people, at least in my riding, scratch their heads on and just say.... How do you come up with that? You sit around the cabinet table and say: "I've got an idea. Let's take an existing bridge that's permitted, approved, designed for rapid transit, an expansion of lanes, fully supported. Let's scrap the \$100 million

right now. Let's get rid of it. What we're going to do" — get a load of this: "is we're going to replace the tunnel that we have no permitting for. We're just going to drop it in."

They say: "Minister, hold on a second. There are three lanes of traffic in counterflow going when there's rush hour." "No, I've got a better idea." For the new tunnel, we'll make sure there are three lanes open. I guess that's a bit of a challenge. That wasn't mentioned in the throne speech. I probably wouldn't have mentioned it either. It's a little bit embarrassing.

If the minister would take the time to come out to Surrey and maybe come to my community, where there isn't access to....

Interjection.

T. Halford: Yeah. It was quite underwhelming, I heard.

Interjection.

T. Halford: I did hear that.
Do you SkyTrain in?

Interjection.

T. Halford: I don't think so.
Do you take the Massey Tunnel?

Interjections.

T. Halford: Anyway, the minister claims to be a new-found resident of Surrey, which I think is quite enlightening, given the fact that he's about to replace an aging tunnel with a three-lane....

Interjection.

[4:10 p.m.]

T. Halford: I challenge the minister to come out to my community, where we've got 5,000 people that have no access to public transit. They're new Canadians. They're students. They're single moms.

There hasn't been investment in rapid transit in South Surrey that was designed with the Massey crossing.... This minister scrapped it in order to duplicate a tunnel that will have three links. It must have been the same conversation they had when they were going to replace the Pattullo Bridge. I would probably avoid Surrey too if that was my transportation plan.

With that, I think that there were opportunities that were definitely missed in the throne speech. I agree with the member either yesterday or the day before.... I don't know the exact word, but it seemed to emphasize that it was boring or underwhelming or whatever it may be. I think that'd be appropriate.

I think that all in all, this was a throne speech that

resembled a *Seinfeld* episode in that it was kind of about nothing. Somebody else's fault, like I previously said. It wasn't an inspiring speech.

Like I said, I hardly heard any mention of seniors, if at all.

Interjection.

T. Halford: Did they?

God forbid somebody mentions the resource sector. LNG — it might have been a good time to announce, maybe, the approval of a project like Cedar that is led by First Nations, supported by First Nations. Nothing on that. They had nothing on forestry. Nothing on phase 2.

I get that that's a sensitive topic inside that caucus and cabinet. I understand that. I get that's a challenge. But I think with throne speeches, there are opportunities to give British Columbians hope, and what we saw was a government coasting on fumes right now that has kind of run out of ideas.

Maybe that's a good thing when your idea is to take a tunnel and replace it with a tunnel and have three lanes going in when traffic is.... It's actually the worst bottleneck in western Canada. The minister would know that if he.... Maybe he has missed a flight or a ferry while he's stuck at the at the Massey tunnel. I don't know.

I think, in closing....

We welcome the member for Surrey-Panorama back after her municipal bid. I mean that respectfully.

I will say this. Part of the challenge is that I think British Columbians wanted more. I know my residents wanted more in this throne speech. With that, Madam Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity.

J. Sims: Thank you to my colleague for the shout-out. We have almost adjoining constituencies.

I stand today in support of the throne speech.

Before I get to do that, I do want to acknowledge the good people of Surrey-Panorama. I am always humbled and see it as a privilege that I get elected, that I get voted for by them and that I come here to represent them and be their voice and take the work of government back into my riding. I'm always amazed by their faith in me and the trust, but also their commitment to building more inclusive communities.

I want to thank all the volunteers — I'm not talking about the volunteers who come into my office, but I'm going to include them — in our communities that make our communities vibrant. They give so much and enrich our experiences.

[4:15 p.m.]

A huge shout-out to my staff, Jen Campbell and Mindy Bansal, who are my CAs. As many have said before me, they do the hard lifting while we are here, and they do the work that makes us look good. I'm very, very fortunate to have two amazing constituency assistants serving my con-

stituents. I can tell you that not a day goes by when I don't get an email or a text message to say what an amazing service they do provide to the constituents who come in. It's a very, very busy office.

Like others, Madam Speaker, I have a family. I'm always very, very thankful I have such a supportive family. Being a female elected official has some additional challenges, as you know. We can only do this job when the rest of our family members, our partners, step forward, and they take on a lot of the duties that we cannot do. They support us unconditionally while we carry on to serve the people of British Columbia.

I can tell you I could not do this without the support of my husband, Stephen Sims; my two amazing children, Keeran and Michael Sims; and my three grandchildren. Of course, I always have to mention little Alliya, my great-granddaughter, who gives me nothing but delight and that unconditional love. Like the rest of you, I do miss some magical moments with them. I'm not able to be there for all of their big moments, but I do know that they're with me, and I know that they are with me as I do this work.

You know, I have been thinking about why we run to serve. I'm saying this about all of us. It doesn't matter which side of the House you sit on; every one of us runs to serve because we want to do something good in our communities. We want to make improvements. We want to fight for a more just society, a more inclusive society. Fight for child care. Fight for more housing. Address the major challenges that our communities are facing.

Yes, sometimes we have disagreements. Sometimes it even gets loud in here. But I would say, on the whole, every one of us comes here with good intentions. I will tell you that the people of British Columbia are better served when we work together, and when we work together in a very respectful way.

I think it behooves each and every one of us, as I look at what's going on around the world.... Whether it's the war in Ukraine; whether it's the earthquake in Türkiye and Syria, with all those Syrians there; whether it's this kind of toxic disrespect for public discourse that is going on out there where people feel free to attack verbally and sometimes even physically, I think, as elected officials, it behooves us to model respectful discourse where we can agree to disagree without becoming disagreeable in the process. I know that every one of us will work hard to do that this year.

Well, Madam Speaker, I do support this throne speech unconditionally. I can tell you that I did not find it boring. I found it aspirational. I found it captured a lot of the work, the foundational work, that has been laid, but it also laid out a map for the future. It's a map not just with an overview, without any more details. It's a map to action. It's a throne speech that is focused on outcomes. I've heard that word a lot recently. It's focused on outcomes. It's focused on taking action.

When you look at the new Premier of British Colum-

bia.... Since he has become Premier, he has been moving forward at a breakneck speed. Going backwards and forwards to Ottawa is one thing, but also, the work he has done in the first 100 days is truly, truly amazing. The same goes for the rest of the ministers, who are really out there to make sure that what our commitments were as a government are actually being carried out.

[4:20 p.m.]

For me, it's always hard to sit here when people keep saying: "Yeah, but they're just announcements. They're just announcements." I keep thinking: "Yes, you have to have an announcement first, before the action comes." There are hundreds and thousands of actions and events that have taken place.

I've noticed that the Minister for Transportation and Infrastructure is sitting here, and I want to do a shout out to him, as well, for his trip to Surrey to speak to the Surrey Board of Trade, where he gave a very, very comprehensive overview of our plans to grow trade and to improve mobility.

What I'm really impressed with, with this government is the fact that they don't tell the mayors and communities around the province or other groups: "We know what is best, so therefore, you're going to have this." It's that decisions, when they're being made about infrastructure, have been as a result of comprehensive consultation.

I heard a lot about the Massey Tunnel today, and it's a tunnel I've traveled through a fair bit. Yes, there have been times I have been stuck there for a long time. I would say, during one of these snowstorms, 8½ hours it took me to get home, for a trip that normally would have taken me about 30 minutes. So yes, I have been there.

I really have been impressed at the work that this government took to consult with the mayors to make sure we had an agreement from all the mayors in the region, because everybody was going to be impacted.

It took into effect that having ten lanes going over where the tunnel is.... Those ten lanes would actually end up in Richmond, and the Richmond mayor and the Richmond council were opposed, at that time, because they knew the parking lot would be moved from one side to the other side. The consultation that took place with the First Nations and all of those things — I'm very, very proud of the way that it happens.

I'm also proud of the fact of how quickly this government took steps to make sure that infrastructure was being invested in. The new Skytrain plan, the Skytrain that's going to go to Langley and that the Lower Mainland is going to benefit from, is going to help to move people. The work on that will start, I'm sure, very, very shortly, though you do see the widening of the roads and other things happening right now.

I also want to say that even when I go down Highway 99, I've noticed the widening of the ramps, a new ramp at 32 and 99, that will actually help to get rid of some of that gridlock that we have right now.

Once again, Minister, thank you. Thank you for coming to Surrey. I know you were very well-received by the Surrey Board of Trade. The feedback after the meeting was really very, very positive. Thank you for that.

Let me just talk about outcomes, because as we hear often: "Where are the outcomes?" Well, I can tell you for people in British Columbia, when the MSP premiums were gone, that was an outcome. That was very, very real. When the tolls were gone, that was a very real outcome.

I could go on, maybe for about 8½ hours, about everything that has happened in the first few years, but I'm not going to go there, because what I want to talk about is that this throne speech is being delivered, has been delivered, in the context of the many challenges that not only British Columbians face but challenges faced around the world. We have to acknowledge those challenges, because they've had a real impact on our citizens and on our governments.

We've had the worst fire seasons, floods like I've never seen before, and I've been living in Canada since 1975. Actually, watching those on TV was just horrific. We know the kind of damage that those floods did, atmospheric floods. We're creating new language now. Even when it was a bit of a heavy rain, somebody was talking about atmospheric rain, and I thought: "What other kind is there?"

[4:25 p.m.]

COVID, and of course, as we know, with the war in Ukraine and many of the challenges that the supply chain suffers. Huge, huge affordability challenges that are being faced by our citizens. We cannot ignore that those challenges are not local challenges. Those challenges are international challenges, and people are struggling with them right across.

I had the privilege of travel after seven long years. I did a trip to India. I had to go for a family wedding, and those are always nice things to go to. It was one of my cousins. What I really found amazing was affordability issues are there just as much as here. They are there in England. The cost of food, the cost of fuel, the cost of housing — all of those issues are international issues.

I am so pleased that this government is tackling them head on. They are not ignoring them. They are realizing that those are things we really have to tackle. As you know, I've been a teacher all my life, except for my stint as an elected official, and I can say one thing to you. It makes me so proud that I'm a member of this government when I see the investment we have made in our children.

There is a saying I used to use a lot. When you look at a society, I don't judge a society, nor do other people, by how many big cars, how many big houses, which brand you are wearing. To me, you judge — I would say, in this case, a government — by how well it looks after its children, its sick, its old and those who can't support themselves.

I can tell you there was a time we had a government that would have got a failing grade in every one of those categories. I could wax eloquent about that for a long,

long time, but I'm not going to, because we're going to look forward.

Looking forward, the investments that have gone into public education, building of schools in Surrey.... There are almost weekly announcements. I can tell you.... Over 11,500 new student spaces built in Surrey. Yes, there are still portables. Surrey is one of the fastest-growing cities. I got told by the mayor the other day that we get about 1,600 new people moving in every month. It is very, very hard to keep up with that, but I do know there is a plan to accelerate the building even further than that.

Also, when I look at the amazing investment that has gone into child care, we know that the first five, seven years of a child's life are very important. They're a foundation. Give me the child before the age of seven and therein follows the adult. I changed the wording a bit to be more appropriate for today, but we know that's true.

Children who receive early childhood education.... I'm not talking about babysitting. I am talking about early childhood education. That investment actually saves in the long run, both in the public school system through savings, and in health care and in law enforcement. All of those things are there.

The amount of investments that have gone into child care have been incredible. Our government took the lead, and it was good to see the federal government coming to the table and supplementing that, which has made us able to accelerate.

I got the numbers here for Surrey-Panorama. Surrey is quite a large city. We have eight ridings currently, hoping to have more with the maps being redrawn. Then there's White Rock, which is right next to us, which is the ninth riding.

In Surrey-Panorama alone, there has been an investment of \$29 million in child care. That is quite something. When you look, 273 new child care spaces, and there are \$10-a-day spaces in that as well. Surrey as a whole, 2,889 new child care spaces, of which 222 are \$10-a-day.

[4:30 p.m.]

I know it's hard when we start using numbers like millions — it is for me, even — but an investment in Surrey, into child care alone, of \$265 million has led to outcomes. When you look at how much went back into the parents' pockets as a result of the savings, for Surrey-Panorama, my riding, it's \$13.9 million. That was right up to the end of 2022. Then when you look at how much it was for all of Surrey, the money that went back into people's pockets, it's much, much higher than that.

Those are real outcomes, and you're not going to tell me that the people who are benefiting from those child care spaces are not benefiting. When parents make those savings — I have talked to Julie, talked to Michael, talked to Emily — what they will tell me is this. Having that lower-cost child care has given them a chance to put more food on the table — good food; spend money on their family;

even have the odd outing, which they might not have had before.

For me, all of that helps, and this money, when it goes back to parents, isn't money that's going to go to the Cayman Islands and sit in a tax shelter. This money is going to be spent in the community, and the community is going to benefit.

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

Mr. Speaker, as you know, there is good research — out of the University of Toronto, European universities, UBC and others — that every dollar invested in child care gets you \$3 to \$5 back. That's what it generates. So these are not only good for our kids; these are good economic investments. Also, growing the child care workforce is another commitment: giving an uplift, a lift to their wages so that they can make a decent wage and do this work, and we can attract other people, as well as additional places that have been opened up for their training.

Let's go and talk a little bit about post-secondary, and I'm going to focus on Surrey again. I had the privilege of going to the opening of the engineering school right there in Surrey and to the announcement and the business plan presentation of the medical school that's going to be opening in Surrey, as well as the investments that have gone into other programs that exist. More nurses, more doctors will be coming. When I look at the deliverables, I'm seeing these deliverables not far away. In my own riding, in my own city, those deliverables are there. Outcomes are there in other parts as well.

Looking at health care, each and every one of us, I am sure, is always, always grateful for the amazing work being done by our health care workers. I can tell you that I could not do their job; I could not. My granddaughter became a nurse, as I shared in this House last spring. She is working, and she puts in incredibly long hours even though she's a brand-new nurse. Even on her day off, she can get called in. But her commitment to her profession is just amazing.

There's the additional work of our Health Minister — I would say he's the Eveready bunny — who's on the go all the time and is one of the hardest-working ministers, in opening up the new primary care centres. Expansions to Peace Arch Hospital — there is an outcome right there in my colleague's riding. I was there for the shovels in the ground and was there when the expansion was finished — all within our term.

[4:35 p.m.]

Those are outcomes, and those outcomes — the expansion of the emergency room, the extra beds in there — make a real difference for people who live there. The Surrey hospital, as we know, is coming. Yes, it's taking time, but it's a \$1.7 billion project. It's out to procurement, and it will proceed. That is an outcome. The land is there; the planning is done.

I also want to talk about the amazing work that the min-

ister has done in addressing international credentials and attracting more internationally trained health care workers into our system because we know we need that.

I'm going to go on and talk a little bit about housing. There was an announcement made today, actually, an opening today, that happened in Surrey. We talk about outcomes always as if.... My colleagues in opposition always talk as if this government has done nothing. Give me ten hours, and I can go through the full list, but I only have eight minutes, so I'm going to focus in on....

Interjection.

J. Sims: Affordable homes for veterans opened in Surrey today. Amazing — 100 new affordable rental homes open for veterans, first responders, legion members, families and individuals. That's located right in the heart of the city.

Our government partnered up with that, \$12 million through our community housing fund. That is a real deliverable that people in Surrey did the opening for today. That is an outcome of a government committed to taking action. The tower is a 20-story building with 91 provincially funded homes, prioritized for Canadian veterans, first responders and legion members.

Now, here's something else. The new housing is one part of the Legion Veterans Village. It's a multipurpose social infrastructure project. We're really, really grateful for the work that the B.C.-Yukon Command of the Royal Canadian Legion did with Whalley Legion Branch 229 and, of course, the Lark Group.

When I look at this facility, which is going to have a new state-of-the-art Whalley Legion Branch 229, with a restaurant, a bar, a full-service industrial kitchen, cadet assembly hall, banquet room, lounge, underground parking — all on site — nobody can tell me that is not a deliverable. I was there. I've been going to that legion since I was elected, since 2011. That legion was in dire need of being replaced — once again, a government that delivered, and delivered in real terms, for real people. It will be there.

Mr. Speaker, as you also know, we have a ministry now that is devoted to housing. We know that we have a shortage of rentals, but we also know that we have an average working family, and we need homes for that middle-class working family. Our government is focused — I'm going to use this, though I used to mock it — like a laser on addressing the housing crisis that we have right now.

When you look at the work this government is doing, I don't think anybody could say that this government is not focused on outcomes. I can tell you that our Premier's single-minded focus is on addressing the affordability issues and the challenges faced by British Columbians today.

When we talk about the different work being done by the government, it is not this or that. We have to be doing all of these things at the same time. When we look at the state of our economy, I think economists have been giv-

ing us triple-A ratings, but they've also said that out of all the provinces, we are the best positioned to glide our way through difficult times.

[4:40 p.m.]

As we know, in the speech, it talks about the surplus that the government has, and the Premier's and this government's commitment to using that surplus to provide services to people, to make sure that we invest that money in housing, infrastructure, child care and other ways to make sure that people get the support they need.

The economic forecast that came out yesterday said B.C. is not doing bad. Actually, B.C. is doing pretty good. They're doing pretty good because they are forecasting one million job opportunities over the next decade. They are jobs that are going to require post-secondary, so the investments being made in that area are absolutely critical. Our post-secondary minister is absolutely focused in on growing that workforce.

Sometimes you remember things. I can remember being in the school system when the apprenticeship programs were decimated, and they disappeared overnight. Then, of course, we had a skills shortage because for decades we didn't do the investments that were required right into the apprenticeship system.

I'm so proud of our government, that it's taking a look at the skill shortages. It has focused in on where those shortages are and on growing our apprenticeship pool, should I say, all over again. That's what good governments do. Good governments not only look at the present, but they look into the future.

Right now we have a government in B.C. Yes, it had to make up for what happened a long time ago, for 16 years. What it has been doing is, rather than dwelling on that, building for the future, looking at where the deficits were, where the foundational pieces have to be changed, where the vision had to be redrawn, and its focus is on the people of British Columbia, on 99 percent of the people of British Columbia.

You know what? Businesses around the world and across Canada are looking at us, and they are moving here because they see this as the happening place, as my granddaughter would say. This is a happening place they want to be in, because they see a progressive government that is committed to child care, tackling housing, supporting the IT sector, being responsible with the resource sector and also tackling climate change, looking at affordability issues for our communities and, last but not least, a government that is committed to addressing systemic racism that is a scourge on any society.

I am proud of the work that our government has done in that area. We've taken a baby step. There's still a long way to go.

As I have said many, many times, our Premier and our previous Premier have shown amazing leadership. They have done lots. As we sit in this House working together, we still have lots more to do, because there are British Col-

umbians out there who are facing the challenges around grocery bills, around gas bills, around rent increases and mortgage payments almost doubling.

We can do it, and we can do it with this government.

A. Olsen: Thank you for the opportunity to provide my response to the Speech from the Throne. It always reminds me, when we get into this part of the debate in the spring session, that as you're listening to the government side of the House, it sounds a lot like Tegan and Sara's song that they made for *The Lego Movie*. Everything is awesome; everything is cool when you're part of the team.

Then when you listen to the other side of the House, they provide, I think, some of the balance that needs to be brought to the reality that's facing British Columbians.

[4:45 p.m.]

Interjection.

A. Olsen: Well, it's not awful, but there are things that need to be done. There's absolutely no question about that.

I just want to start here. There's a line in this speech that really caught my attention, and I think that it's important that I just get it out of the way now. It is: "Your government's vision for B.C. moving forward is one that recognizes inherent rights as our greatest act of reconciliation and respect." On the face of it, I think that it's a line that would be easily acceptable. You just move right past it. However, the reality of "inherent" and the definition of "inherent" is that it is existing in something as permanent, essential or a characteristic attribute.

I don't view this as being the greatest act of reconciliation. I view the recognition of inherent rights as something that is not a great act of reconciliation. It'd be something that we should just easily accept. I just wanted to point this out because I think that this often highlights the gap that we need to close in our society when it comes, and it has been closing in our society.

In fact, in reading Jody Wilson-Raybould's new book, *True Reconciliation*, over the last few weeks, I agree with her on the fact that we have made great progress on Indigenous rights in this province and that actually, this work is moving exponentially here in British Columbia. This is a point of everything being closer to awesome than closer to awful, as the minister had suggested.

I just wanted to acknowledge that I think that when we want to use language to add colour and add definition to the work that's happening, we need to be careful. This is something that.... Unfortunately, for decades in this province, the inherent rights of Indigenous people have been neglected. They've been overlooked. They've been ignored. So we indeed should do this. It's something that is the most basic thing that we're doing in this province: recognizing the inherent rights of the Indigenous nations here.

I'm disappointed that this speech did not mention the fundamental, what is the next step, in the work that we're doing on reconciliation, and that is a new fiscal relationship with Indigenous people. The work that happened with the declaration on the rights of Indigenous people was critical in laying the groundwork for the legislative aspect of the relationship, but definitely the next step of this is going to be a new, a renewed, a reinvigorated fiscal relationship with Indigenous people.

We indeed can't move forward on the promises and the commitments that have been made with the Indigenous nations across the province if we don't have and establish a new fiscal relationship. I'm not talking about a new welfare state, a new, shinier version of what has already been in place — funding for Indigenous, First Nations communities based entirely on just resource extraction agreements, benefits agreements, as have been the foundation of the financing of First Nations in the past.

What I'm talking about is, I think, what the former Premier talked about when he openly acknowledged rights, title and sovereignty. That is that Indigenous nations.... Indeed, the Canadian court system has identified the fact that at the very least, there's a shared sovereignty in this country and in this province. Therefore, Indigenous nations should be able to benefit from the wealth of their territories, certainly.

These are not traps of colonial documents that are written to the advantage of the Crown governments. This is access to revenues that don't have the strings attached, like we've seen in these benefits agreements, but that are elected and hereditary and that the leaderships in our communities are able to begin managing the wealth of their territory, rather than poverty like we have seen.

[4:50 p.m.]

As we celebrated yesterday the first move to bring in the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation here as a stat holiday in British Columbia, we see great progress that's happened over the last decade in this province, and that definitely needs to be celebrated. I look forward to the next stage of that work, which is going to be reorganizing the fiscal relationship between Indigenous nations and the Crown governments.

When I look at this speech, the first thing I that notice.... You know, I've been around politics for a while, and you're around polls and polling. It's hard not to miss the definite key words that are used in here to ensure that this speech polls well, to ensure that it captures the attention — the buzzwords that capture the attention of British Columbians. Use of the word "stronger" repeated through. We know these words are meant to catch the attention.... This is, if nothing else, a communications exercise.

The throne speech identifies, it communicates, to the province of British Columbia, to all of the residents, to all our constituents, the priorities of the provincial government. Certainly, this speech, like many throne speeches.... But for this speech, I think it's important to just identify

that this was virtually littered with a lot of buzzwords that I think.... When we ask the government exactly what they mean with this, I think they'd be troubled to be able to define exactly what it is. But the words are good. The words are strong. The rhetoric is good.

Now, I think what it is that we're going to be looking to as the budget comes.... Really, this is the first step of a spring legislative session, where the next step is going to be our budget. We're going to see exactly the definition around how the government is going to make investments in middle-class housing. What does that mean? For example, exactly what is the definition of that? We shall see, I guess, in the upcoming budget.

When we talk about housing and the fact that the government has committed to a refreshed housing strategy, I think it is important to acknowledge that even though this provincial government that came into power in 2017 has had a focus on affordability throughout a kind of.... A common theme line through the work that the government has packaged for British Columbians has been affordability. When it comes to addressing affordability in housing and addressing homelessness, it has been incredibly challenging for this government to be able to actually deliver on the message that they have been telling.

A \$7 billion investment to build 114,000 units of housing was the commitment. Build them within ten years. That was a pledge that was renewed in the 2020 election. Currently, I think we're seeing that about 15,000 units have been built. Another 11,000 are under construction. A total of 36,000 units of housing built or under construction. A far, far cry from the 114,000 units that had been promised to British Columbians.

I think there is sort of an assumption here that a unit of housing is a unit of housing. What do I mean by that? Well, you know, there is a building.... Just putting out and just saying that we're going to put 114,000 units of housing into a market really doesn't provide any context about what those units are. Are they affordable units? Are they the most expensive housing in the province?

I think what we've seen is that often, announcements of new rental housing coming into the market are being built, being celebrated, ribbons being cut. Yet when you take a look at what the cost of that housing is, it's unattainable for generations that are living in our society. People working in our communities cannot live in the communities that they're working in. They have to travel great distances, commute great distances, in order to be able to get to their job.

The number one thing that I've heard from many of my constituents is that even though the government has claimed to be building affordable housing, the fact of the matter is that the housing that is coming online is far from affordable in most cases. That's the reason why we have focused on, I and my colleague have focused on.... The public money that's being invested into housing in our province needs to be focused on non-market solutions.

[4:55 p.m.]

The players in the housing market have a profit motivation. So they're going to want to be able to make sure that they can profit from the work that they're doing. The provincial government is in the unique position to be able to remove that motivation from the equation and ensure that the most deeply affordable units of housing, homes, for British Columbians, that are built are ones where they can ensure that affordability. In fact, it's only the provincial government that can assure, in partnership with municipalities, that housing is below market.

We see in many of the housing needs assessments in communities here in the capital regional district, in communities across the province, that the greatest need is actually in below-market housing. Yet thousands of units are being built, and none of them are actually below-market housing. The older housing stock that is being preyed upon by investors and being preyed upon by REITs, the real estate investment trusts that I know this provincial government has now turned its eye on — those units are being threatened, either by renoviction or demoviction, and replaced with housing units that are not affordable.

The worry I have is we're going to continue to see deeply affordable housing units be turned over, rents increased. I really look forward to the rental protection fund that's coming forward. It couldn't come fast enough. There are deeply affordable units of rental housing in my riding right now that are threatened. This rental protection fund cannot come quickly enough to purchase those buildings, and the legislation cannot come quickly enough in order to ensure that people who are able to afford rent now are not put in a position a couple of months down the road where they cannot afford their living expenses and they cannot afford the cost of their housing.

I'll repeat this. I've said it in question period; I've said it a number of times. We need to make sure that when this provincial government is investing public money, there's a public good coming out of that, and the most important public good that we should be getting out of the investments that we're making are units of housing that are affordable and attainable and not just have a kind of nice, shiny wrapper around them saying that they're affordable or attainable housing but they actually are affordable.

Moving on to health care, I think that it's important to just begin by saying that over the last number of weeks, number of months, I've met with and had many conversations with health care workers about their jobs, about the work that they're doing in our communities. I think it's really important to just start by saying that I raise my hands to all of those that I've met with, all of those that I've talked to, and thank them for the great care that they're giving British Columbians.

Unfortunately, many of the stories that they have been telling me, many of the stories that my constituents who have been patients in the health care system have been telling me, is that the health care system is failing them.

I've heard clearly from those front-line workers that they're not feeling supported by health authorities, that they feel threatened to speak about the dangerous working conditions and patient care that they are experiencing.

Conversely, I've heard the ministry and the minister directly contradict the information that I've heard with my own ears. So this is very, very challenging for me to be able to reconcile. We know that the stress that is being felt by front-line health care workers is real. I think that what we need is a reset. The rhetoric on this has ramped up to the point where I don't think we're even having the same conversation anymore, frankly.

I know that examples have been brought to my attention where nurses are put in an extremely dangerous situation, where health facilities are so far understaffed that nurses are doing work that they shouldn't be doing, that there's no security in the buildings. These are all examples that have been brought to me in my constituency office, and certainly, they need to be reconciled, and they need to be reconciled very, very quickly.

[5:00 p.m.]

I think it's also important to acknowledge that I can't remember the last time that the minister has mentioned the urgent and primary care centres. It has been a long time since that project that was going to be the solution for the primary health care challenges that we're facing — nearly one million British Columbians without access to a family practice doctor.... Really, I think that the failure of that system was predicted. Now we need to move our primary health care system toward the very successful model that has grown organically in my community. One example of that is Shoreline Medical.

I really hope that rather than ignoring the fact that this has been a successful project in our community and rather than, I guess, feeling like it wasn't an idea of government, so it's not going to be a part of the solution, that we really see these clinics that have shown success to be part of the solution. I really hope to see the ministry step up and say: "How is it that we can support and stabilize and ensure, in the short term, that these models that have grown out of the community, that are organic, can be successful and can be supported?"

As we know, while the government has taken time to get a new remuneration model for family doctors, many doctors have retired out of frustration and exhaustion, stranding many more British Columbians — I think, frankly, unnecessarily — without a doctor. In that vacuum, there has been a corporate delivery model that has begun to evolve. We see that with Telus LifePlus and with Harrison Healthcare. We've been raising these issues.

I want, really, to say at this point that we're thankful for the fact that the Medical Services Commission has sought injunctions against these businesses and that this is going to be cleared up. The reality of the privatization of health care services in our community continues to draw what are already short-staffed scenarios in our hospitals and in

our health care facilities, drawing people out of those systems and having them work elsewhere and having them work in a profit model that, frankly, is not accessible or equitable or universal for British Columbians, just as the health care system we have been promised for generations and for decades in our province.

In the Speech from the Throne, this government pledged to act with great urgency on climate change and acknowledge that B.C. is yet some way away from meeting its greenhouse gas emissions target. We saw that last fall. The proposed solution is to introduce legislation to improve access to electric vehicle charging stations in condo buildings.

I think it's really important to acknowledge that this is not going to be enough in order for us to meet those climate targets in 2025 and 2030. It's pretty clear to me that this government hasn't figured out how it's going to cut greenhouse gas emissions fast enough in order to meet those targets.

What is further challenging this situation in a very large way is that we have, poised in the North, an LNG industry that wants and is interested in massive expansion. Over the last number of years — since 2018 or 2019, when CleanBC came out — this B.C. NDP government has really hung its hat on CleanBC. We know that only the first half of LNG Canada is accounted for in CleanBC. We've heard words such as "award-winning" be attributed to CleanBC. It's the most progressive and the best climate action plan in North America, in the continent. It's a continent-leading climate action plan. Yet only the first half of LNG Canada is included in that plan.

[5:05 p.m.]

With at least five more — at least five more — LNG facilities proposed to be built on our north and central coast, this provincial government has a huge job ahead of them.

We are already not meeting our climate targets. By not setting the tone early on — five years ago, six years ago; by not clearly articulating that we are not going to be able to do both things, both meet our climate targets and have the massive expansion of this nascent LNG industry, this provincial government has got itself into the situation that we find ourselves in today: pipelines being dragged across the province, expansion in the fracking fields and expansion in the gas liquefaction projects on the coast.

The fossil fuel industry in British Columbia is poised to absolutely blow up our emissions targets, and this NDP government has basically sat back and watched while.... We have an example just published yesterday, the Alberta United Conservative Party and their publicly funded pro-fossil fuel war room greenwashing fracked gas, selling it as low-carbon gas. What is that? It's still gas. It still burns and emits. It still is methane-emitting and blowing up whatever targets that we are, frankly, I think, pretending like we're going to meet in this province.

If we think that we can continue to allow this industry

to grow, not take a strong stand against, as the Premier did when he was trying to, I think, hold back the tidal wave of supporters for his only competitor in that leadership race.... He said: "There's going to be no new fossil fuel infrastructure built." Ever since then, those comments have been backtracked.

The Premier was asked in question period last fall. He wouldn't take a strong stand. Now we have a situation where we've got Woodfibre, we've got Tilbury, we've got Ksi Lisims, we've got phase 2 of LNG Canada, and we've got Cedar LNG all poised on our coast, ready to go, ready to make investments if at all possible. And we have the province to the east of us also pushing and encouraging and wanting that to grow.

We cannot meet our climate targets in this province and have an LNG industry grow, and it's time, I think, that there's some honesty in that conversation about exactly what we are going to do about this situation that we face in our province right now: a promise to meet CleanBC, a promise to uphold this so-called award-winning plan, the promise to meet our climate emissions targets. I think that this is going to be something in the next 12 months, definitely before the next election, that this provincial government is going to have to reconcile.

When it comes to the work that the Premier has outlined for the Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship, the biodiversity and ecosystem health, I don't think that I can sit next to my colleague from Coquitlam-Burke Mountain and not mention the work that he's done on salmon, the work that we did on salmon back in the early days just after I got elected, the work that we've done on the forest industry over the last number of years and the reality that we have to find and develop a new relationship with nature in our province.

We have a forestry industry that's collapsing due to a lack of fibre and as a result of unsustainable harvesting over decades. This government's response is the grand total of about two lines, one referencing forestry and the other referencing old-growth strategic review. We have, in this province, clearcut our way into this problem, and we must change the policy that requires the chief forester's decision-making to not unduly impact timber harvest.

[5:10 p.m.]

We must change the factors the chief foresters need to consider by clearly adding biodiversity and ecosystem health into their decision-making matrix. This was an opportunity that the former Forests Minister was given when the Forest Statutes Act was opened the last time. In the fall of 2021, we were told that it was not necessary. We were also told in the election of 2020 that this government was going to implement all of the old-growth strategic review recommendations.

I believe it's recommendation 2, that is made by the government's own panellists, that states that we need to be protecting for biodiversity and ecosystem health, and we need to be doing it in legislation, not in flashy

communications documents that have no impact on the decisions that are being made by the statutory decision-makers in this government.

I'm happy that the Minister of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship has been mandated to protect 30 percent of land and water by 2030. That is an excellent first step, and I look forward to understanding what that means and what that looks like. We desperately need a coastal protection act, and we desperately need a plan to address invasive species.

I have one example in my riding I want to highlight here. It's the Mayne Island fallow deer issue. We have fallow deer on Sidney Island. This has been an issue that has been plaguing Mayne Island and the southern Gulf Islands for decades, when the Ministry of Agriculture approved a deer farm. Then, when that farm decided it was going to be done, they just released the deer. Now we have these deer that are absolutely devastating all other species, destroying places where birds nest, destroying local native plant species, destroying ecosystems where native deer species once thrived.

What we need from this provincial government is not to have this pushed off to local governments. Wildlife is clearly the responsibility of the provincial government. If we are going to be serious about biodiversity and ecosystem health, we have to take a strong stand and make the investments that are needed in order to deal with invasive species when we know that, first of all, we are part of the problem by creating it. We know that other species are being, basically, eaten out of home, and they have no home, because they just don't exist.

I'll finally say this. I think it's unfortunate that there is no real, strong mention of the conservation financing piece that is in the Ministry of Water, Land, and Resource Stewardship. I'd like to see a timeline on when that conservation financing piece is going to come forward.

I'll also say I think that we have been moving from innovation to conservation, and now we need to really start to look at what a restoration economy looks like in British Columbia. There are really exciting opportunities to be rebuilding not tree farms, but vibrant, biodiverse forests in this province once again. There is clearly, I think, looking forward, a future in this province for a restoration economy, for marine stewardship. We see many of the First Nations stewardship programs, land stewardship. I think that the conversation needs to move from just conservation to restoration.

I surely hope that the Minister of Water and Land embraces that opportunity, embraces the opportunities that might be coming from the federal government, and that the Premier and the Minister of Finance embrace the opportunity to take the funds that have been available to us, add and invest provincial money into that and really start to transition the jobs of previous generations into the jobs of future generations.

For that, Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity,

for this brief time, to speak to the throne speech. I had much more to say, but I'll leave it at that. I'll leave it to my colleague.

HÍSWKE SIÁM. Thank you very much.

R. Glumac: I'm excited today to rise in the House and speak to the throne speech. It's what some have said is one of the best throne speeches they've ever heard. I guess we'll know in the course of time, because the things that we're laying out will take time to do. Time is the ultimate way to determine the success of things.

[5:15 p.m.]

With that, I'd like to talk a little bit about 2017, when we first became government. To be honest, we inherited a province that had been damaged by cuts to services for 16 years, cuts to health care, cuts to education. It's been our job, as a government, to repair that damage. It's a job that we're taking very seriously, but it takes time. It takes time to repair that kind of damage, and there's more work to do.

Of course, in our efforts to strengthen our public health care, we've faced some big challenges with a worldwide pandemic, but we're continuing to move forward. We're continuing to invest in new hospitals. We're creating a medical school at SFU. We're getting more internationally trained doctors and nurses working in the system. We're investing in family doctors. There's so much more that we're doing to improve health care in B.C. We're doing this work.

It's interesting to hear the Leader of the Opposition talk about investing in mental health supports. Looking back through history, he was front and centre in cutting health care services.

In 2001, when the B.C. Liberals first were elected, one of their first orders of business was to cut \$35 million in supports for mental health and addictions for youth. Not long after that, the government completely deregulated recovery homes so that they had no standards of care. How can that member stand before us and pretend that he cares about health care today when he's dragging that legacy with him? It's a legacy that he hopes, I'm sure, to bring to fruition yet again as leader of a future government.

In 2009, when he was Health Minister, he cut over \$300 million from the health care system — \$300 million. Mental health advocates, at that time, called these cuts staggering. They called the cuts incomprehensible. Today he says: "We're going to make things happen." Well, look what happened. Look how much they cut from the health care system.

Health care is just one thing we can look back on. One of the things that we're really focusing on, as a government, is tackling the housing crisis, cracking down on speculators and launching a middle-class housing strategy.

During the time of B.C. Liberal leadership, it's import-

ant to note.... In 2001, the average price of a home in Vancouver was less than \$400,000. By 2017, that rose to more than \$1.8 million. That's a 350 percent increase over the time of their leadership in government. That's twice as fast as the prices in New York City.

Thanks for that. Thank you to Christy Clark for going to China with at least three real estate firms to promote housing speculation in B.C. They did promote housing speculation in B.C.

You know what else they did? Between 2013 and 2017, the B.C. Liberals sold off 164 pieces of public land that they called surplus. They sold it, in many cases, below assessed value. Many people think the reason they did this is because they were rewarding their political donors. Well, that's true.

[5:20 p.m.]

One example in the Tri-Cities, Burke Mountain. Fourteen parcels of public land sold to one developer, Wesbild, for \$85 million. The government had an independent appraisal that they didn't want the public to see, but it eventually got out. It appraised that land for \$128 million, 50 percent more than what they sold it for. Interestingly, Wesbild has donated over \$700,000 to the B.C. Liberals since 2005.

Interjection.

R. Glumac: It is interesting.

Another example, Coronation Park Elementary School in Coquitlam. The B.C. Liberals were really encouraging schools to sell off land at that time. So they sold that land for \$25 million to Polygon development. That land, located within walking distance of a SkyTrain station and future population growth, was assessed last year for \$107 million, four times more than what it was sold for under the B.C. Liberals. That land went up \$75 million under Polygon ownership.

That land.... Well, it's finally coming for rezoning, but interestingly, with only 7 percent affordable rental housing. Despite the fact that they were able to get that land for quite a good price, we're only seeing 7 percent affordable rental housing. Polygon has donated \$962,000 to the B.C. Liberals since 2005.

When reviewing these and other land sales, the former Auditor General made several recommendations to reduce the risk of bid-rigging, collusion and bias, and our government implemented all of these recommendations. The Finance Minister that was responsible for this fire sale of publicly owned land....

Deputy Speaker: If I might, Member, if you could try and draw your comments to the throne speech, that would be appreciated. Thank you.

R. Glumac: Yeah, absolutely, Mr. Speaker. In the context of the future, I'm trying to set the context for the past. I

mean, I know it's troubling to talk about the past, but the past is looking squarely in our faces from across the aisle every day and speaking to us in the House every day, carrying all of that history and all of that legacy every day.

When we're talking about our goals as a government, we have to look at.... We're not just dealing with the issues of today. We're dealing with the issues of the past. That's what we're doing as a government. We're addressing the....

Interjection.

R. Glumac: No, but do you think we just appeared here, Member, just out of the blue? We're inheriting the legacy of previous governments.

Interjection.

R. Glumac: Today, yes.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: All right, Members. Members, one member has the floor.

R. Glumac: Mr. Speaker, I mean, the point of all of this is when we're talking about the future and we're talking about the work we need to do as a government, one important aspect of that is that we need to do that, and we need to do it responsibly. We need to tackle this important work for the people of British Columbia in a responsible way — responsible with money, responsible with the services that we offer to the people of British Columbia. It's important to distinguish between how we're doing this today versus how it was done in the past so we have some context.

Why was that land sold? Two words: sheer desperation. It turns out the B. C. Liberals, unlike the B.C. NDP, do not know how to balance a budget. They struggle to balance a budget. They struggle. They desperately struggle, so they try different things.

[5:25 p.m.]

They tried to hide taxes in all sorts of secret places, like MSP premiums. They called them premiums because they don't want people to know that they're actually extremely regressive taxes on the lowest-wage earners in the province.

They tried to balance the budget by cutting social services. That's, again, what we're talking about growing and improving here in B.C. In the 16 years of their government, they cut social programs by 27 percent in relation to inflation, not even keeping up to inflation. They tried to balance the budget by raiding money from ICBC and B.C. Hydro, driving them both nearly into bankruptcy.

Let's be clear. When you take money out of a Crown corporation owned by the people of British Columbia, you're not balancing the budget. You're forcing a publicly owned

Crown corporation into a weaker financial position in order to make it look like the provincial budget is balanced when it isn't balanced.

This is troubling for them to hear. You could hear the chatter. You could hear how upset they are to be reminded of all of this, because this is where their leader represents all of this today.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members. Members.

R. Glumac: A responsible government balances the books, not in all these ways that are desperate but by actually balancing the books. In fact, we have a \$5 billion surplus this year. The B.C. NDP did not have to resort to regressive taxes. In fact, we eliminated MSP premiums. We eliminated them, for the largest tax cut in B.C. history.

They're surprised. The B.C. NDP did not cut social services. In fact, we restored funding to social programs that the B.C. Liberals cut, and we did it with a balanced budget. We not only stopped raiding money from ICBC, but we in fact fixed ICBC, which has given money back to the people of British Columbia on multiple occasions and lowered insurance premiums along the way by more than 20 percent.

I hope that we don't ever have to go back to those irresponsible ways of balancing budgets. I like to look to the future, and I'd like to look at our record on what we've done as a province. I'm very proud of the elements of this throne speech that have been laid out for the people of British Columbia.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members, one member has the floor. The House will come to order.

R. Glumac: We're helping people cut costs because we know that times are challenging. We are facing higher interest rates. We're facing more inflation. We're facing a global slowdown of the economy, and we are reducing costs for people, from child care all the way through. We are tackling the housing crisis. We're strengthening the public health care system. We're making our communities safer. We're taking action to get violent offenders off the streets.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: The member will come to order. Member for Kamloops, please come to order.

R. Glumac: Let me repeat, because the member was getting kind of excited about what I was saying. So let me say it again: we're taking actions to get violent offenders off the

streets. We're creating new laws to crack down on gangs and money laundering, something that the previous government also did not do, making our communities safer.

We're also fighting climate change and building an economy for everyone. We're launching a program to provide skills for people for the jobs of today and for the future. We're expanding our low-cost clean energy solutions, and we're working in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

I'm very proud of the work that we're doing here as government. I'm very proud of the ideas presented in the throne speech. I'm sure that over the course of time, even the opposition will come around to saying we're doing a good job.

[5:30 p.m.]

B. Banman: I'm pleased to rise and speak to the Speech from the Throne. I appreciate almost all the comments shared by my colleagues on the floor. I'd like to highlight some matters that are dear to my constituents in Abbotsford South and in my capacity as His Majesty's Official Opposition. I'd also like to thank the Lieutenant-Governor for delivering the Speech from the Throne. As we exercise, truly, the privilege of participating in British Columbia's parliamentary democracy, I wish Her Honour and His Majesty Charles III best wishes as we enter another parliamentary session.

It's critical that British Columbians know what to expect from their government as we emerge from almost six years under this NDP government, with worsening results across the board. Sadly and disappointingly, even after a second term of the NDP government, these are some of the results.

Firstly, housing prices and rents, higher than they've ever been. There was no mention of the \$400 rent rebate. It's still a promise unfulfilled. The cost-of-living crisis, which is punishing families and making life less affordable every day in British Columbia. A collapsing health care system that sees one in five people without a doctor, almost one million people waiting to see a specialist and the longest wait times for a diagnostic, especially for those patients that have cancer, that we've seen in a long, long time. The Premier's failed catch-and-release system, which fails to protect four people a day, randomly attacked.

While this throne speech was full of problems but empty on solutions, what I would like British Columbians at home to know is: better is possible. Better is possible.

One of the most baffling realizations I had from the throne speech was the lack of a plan to address the crisis in our health care system. Now, many of you know that I practised as a chiropractor, and the health and well-being of my patients and British Columbians is near and dear to my heart.

Recently the Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills announced she has her challenges with cancer. As with the former Premier, I don't think there's anyone in this House that would not hope her outcome on

that is to beat it once again. I wish her all of the best and a speedy recovery. Political life is tough. It's stressful. It's that stress that can sometimes trigger these health care crisis events. I wish her nothing but the best, as do all of the members of this House and, I would say, people all across the province.

No one other than the NDP agrees that the current approach to health care is working. We currently have the worst-ranked health care system on this side of the country, with wait times in B.C. having doubled since 2019. It's now 2023, and we still don't have a plan, and the days.... Yes, COVID created a ton of stress and problems on the system, but using COVID as a scapegoat as to why we haven't got plans in place just is not proper, and it needs to stop. We've got to stop looking in the rearview mirror and blaming it for why this government failed to plan, moving forward.

[5:35 p.m.]

This government boasted previously about the UPCC program, but this time there's barely a mention of those programs. I can understand why. I'd be embarrassed to mention when people within the system are calling it the "oopsy program." I can understand why this government didn't want to talk about it. Perhaps it's an indication of another failed policy item by a government that is way too fast to make announcements and promises yet nowhere to be seen when it comes to measuring those results.

The lack of mention of increasing access to health care in rural areas, the overdue ten-year cancer action plan and nothing related to seniors' health, long-term care and assisted living is severely disappointing and alarming.

My colleagues in government have also repeatedly brought up the horrendous situation of B.C.'s health care system while discussing the shortage of health care workers. While we're in dire need of more workers, I'd remind government that we do currently have thousands of health care workers sitting at home waiting to go back to work. West of Nova Scotia, British Columbia is the only province that has yet to follow the federal government's lead on vaccine mandates. Now is the time for the provincial government to suspend its mandates and develop a pathway back to employment, with robust safety protocols in place, for the nearly 2,500 health care workers and other public service employees.

Before the Premier joined other provinces in demanding more health care funding from Ottawa, he should be making sure that B.C. is up to the same standards as our counterparts in federation, having taken the appropriate steps to make sure we have as many people working in our health care system as is possible. The majority of the country and the federal government have followed in allowing workers such as those in health care to go back to the front line. It makes zero sense as to why B.C. cannot do the same. They're able. They're educated. They're ready to go back to work. They deserve to go back to work.

I would need much more time to list off all of the miss-

ing items from the throne speech that people want to hear more about. The NDP didn't mention decriminalization once in their throne speech. It's almost as if they're embarrassed by it. It's almost as if they can see, based on what's happened in other jurisdictions, how it's going to turn out. There's nothing about the government's approach to the mental health and drug addiction crisis from the past six years or even today that makes anyone believe that the current approach is working. It's not.

But better is possible, which is why the B.C. Liberals announced a change in direction, a plan to overhaul the delivery of mental health services and to build a recovery-oriented system of care for those suffering from addiction. While the government failed to tell British Columbians how they will cut the promises and bring results, here's what a B.C. Liberal government would do.

We'd build on innovative models like the Red Fish Healing Centre located on the former Riverview lands, also in regions across the province, so people with severe and complex needs can get the compassionate, 24-7 psychosocial support that they need and deserve.

A B.C. Liberal government would eliminate user fees at publicly funded addiction treatment beds and provide direct government funding for private beds. Money, your ability to pay, shouldn't determine whether or not you get well. A B.C. Liberal government would build regional recovery communities where people struggling with addictions can stay for up to a year with individualized, holistic treatment support. A B.C. Liberal government would also, as a last resort, implement involuntary care for adults and, especially, youth at risk of harm to themselves or others.

[5:40 p.m.]

The failure of this government to address key issues that impact people in our province also stems from the NDP's lacklustre approach to consultation. This is a sign of a government that is out of touch and disconnected from British Columbians.

The throne speech was evidence of this disconnection, and quite frankly, it was confusing. For example, local Indigenous contractors are currently being barred from working on the Cowichan Hospital replacement project on their lands because of the NDP's discriminatory community ripoff agreements. I beg your pardon — the community benefit agreements. These agreements are stopping previously contracted workers from working unless they're a member of an NDP-friendly union. Not to mention there was no mention of this in the throne speech or how it will be fixed, despite multiple calls to the Premier's office from impacted Indigenous workers, the Cowichan Tribes, the opposition and interest groups.

The Cowichan Tribes even went and released a statement criticizing the government's failure to include them in consultations and negotiations of the community benefit agreement. Yet the government is, again, quick to make announcements and hold back on action.

This certainly isn't economic reconciliation and certainly not in line with what the government's commitments were to Indigenous peoples.

The CBAs need to end. I heard that even members of the Third Party have now realized that the grass may be greener on this side, as they have changed their minds on CBAs since previous years.

Maybe it's because of that lack of consultation. That lack of consultation doesn't just stop here. It also hurts the people of Lytton. The people of Lytton are still waiting to go back home after their community was destroyed by wildfire years ago. And in my riding, I get calls from farmers impacted by the Sumas Prairie floods who are still waiting for the promised support and help.

I have to say that in all of these communities — whether it be Lytton, whether it be in Sumas flats, whether it be areas of the province that were devastated by wildfires — that the people who live there got together and they helped one another. The support flooded in from all over this province, all over the country and, in fact, when the floods hit my riding, all over the world, as we are now doing in the earthquakes of Türkiye. The people got together, but it was government that came with promises they are yet to deliver. It should embarrass us as an organization because I know that that's not what government wants to do, but it is the direct result of what we are doing.

We can do better. The people who live there that are trying to recover deserve better. Now if the government had conducted the necessary consultation to the appropriate levels, it would also realize that the long-term support for dealing with emergencies must be implemented immediately. The current solutions have been temporary, and many, many folks are having a difficult time navigating through the complicated, onerous applications for support due to NDP and federal red tape and the surge in bureaucracy.

[5:45 p.m.]

What I'm hearing is that government is all too fast, or the bureaucracy is all too fast, to find any reason to reject a claim, which then forces the very people that have lost almost everything — or everything, in some cases — to reapply. Like one individual said to me: "It's as if the system just wants me to give up."

They deserve better. We can do better, and I know we want to do better. We can and will do better.

I am now the shadow minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. As the MLA for a community that was directly impacted by the natural emergencies of recent years, I'm extremely concerned about the lack of attention put towards protecting British Columbians from such emergencies in the Speech from the Throne. I would have thought that if government deemed it important enough to create a new ministry, and this was not the only one, government would have felt it important enough to have mentioned that ministry in the throne speech. I find it alarming that there was no mention of it.

I would have thought it would have ranked a little higher than to have very little mention at all.

The NDP government is also notorious for being known as Canada's most secretive government, and I have the privilege of also being the shadow minister of Citizens' Services, which includes freedom of information requests. The Speech from the Throne failed to address the concerns that people have had about the information made available from this government, or worse, the information that's not being made available. Freedom of information in B. C. is under threat, and it needs to be taken seriously. The press has mentioned it. People have mentioned it. The Privacy Commissioner has mentioned it.

People expect and deserve better, and I look forward to working with my counterparts and holding government accountable to giving people the better that they and we all deserve. Whether it's going to be the housing crisis, the health care crisis, the overdose crisis, the mental health crisis or the failing catch-and-release justice system, people expect real results that they can see and feel.

The sad fact is that I and others used to brag that Vancouver was one of the safest places to come and visit. It was one of the safest in the world to visit. With up to four people a day being randomly attacked without provocation, we can no longer say that.

The people of this province no longer feel safe in their own cities. I get the calls. I get the emails. We all are getting them. That was under this government's watch that this has risen to this level. Yet, we were told there was nothing that could be done, and now we find out: oh wait, yes, we can do something.

When opposition comes up with an idea, how tough is it to implement it to make us all safer? Those are our parents, our loved ones that are randomly being attacked. We can do better. They're not feeling it with that either. It's not just feeling unsafe. They also feel as if the economy is not doing any better.

This government hasn't done enough to protect families and small businesses. You know, I hear all the time that this government eliminated MSP. What they fail to say is they're actually making more money by dumping it on the backs of small business. They didn't get rid of it. They just renamed it, rebranded it, gave it a new name and dumped it on the small businesses that are struggling just to keep their doors open.

[5:50 p.m.]

There are 44 percent of British Columbians reporting that they are \$200 away or less from being unable to pay their bills at the end of each month, 44 percent — many of which are single families; many of which are single mothers.

Top economists are now predicting that B.C. will be facing a recession in 2023 under this NDP government. How did the government respond? "Well, hey, you know what? We don't hear you at all. We're tone deaf." Instead

of helping, the NDP has introduced 29 new or increased taxes.

Did the NDP bother to take a private member's motion to eliminate the tax on a used car that's \$20,000 or less, a car that has probably or likely been taxed multiple times as it's been sold? It already paid the tax when it was new. Did they give the low-income people just trying to find a reliable ride to get to and from work a break? No, they did not. They could have. They were tone deaf.

The NDP is doubling the total provincial debt per person by 2024. It's doubling to more than \$16,500 for every man, woman and child in this province. Sooner or later you've got to pay the debt that you owe.

Meanwhile, our natural resource sector crumbles down as this government just watches. Shutdown after shutdown after shutdown, with more and more people losing their jobs. What I find curious is that many of these were union jobs, the very jobs this NDP government says they're there to protect. They did nothing as these mills shut down.

The industries that drive this province come from our resource sector. We have been blessed in this province with abundant resources, and we use those to pay down our debt. Take, for instance, the LNG sector. It was absent from the throne speech. While it is controversial, what's not controversial is it is one of the cleaner, more ethical energies. World-leading resources like LNG Canada phase 2, Cedar LNG and Tilbury LNG 2 fund the social programs that we actually need.

This throne speech was full of nice words and empty promises, yet once again, from an NDP government that will not address the challenges people face every day. This Premier's first throne speech.... I hate to say it. It's just more of the same tired NDP rhetoric that has failed to improve the lives of British Columbians.

Now, there is better, and there is hope. Maybe this government will take some of the advice of this side of the House. Maybe they will implement that provincial sales tax on a \$20,000 or less vehicle. Maybe they'll put that in and give the everyday working Joe a chance to be able to get a ride and not have the insult of having to pay a tax on it. Under a B.C. Liberal government, better is possible.

We often get criticized. "Why don't you ever come up with ideas? Opposition, you just complain. Why don't you come up with a few things?" Well, we've come up with more than a few, and they've landed on deaf ears. I would encourage this government to actually listen to this side of the House once in a while.

I've heard members on the floor from the government side say: "Hey, what if we all just work together?" Well, put your money where your mouth is. So far, I don't see much of it. We've come up with valuable ideas, and they've hit deaf ears. It's hit a level of arrogance that I have not witnessed in my spins around the sun in this province.

[5:55 p.m.]

This is not what British Columbians deserve. Far from it. Better is possible.

Before I sit down, I just want to say to the farmers in my riding.... In spite of the tragic events that transpired, farmers did what farmers do. They're the ultimate optimists. They got together with one another and watched farmer helping farmer. They put their crops back in the fields, they rebuilt, and they're ready to feed the rest of British Columbia yet once again.

I want to thank them. In spite of the bureaucracy and the red tape and the too quick to say no when it came to their applications and the complexity of those applications, they're putting food on our table yet once again. I want to thank the thousands of people that went out and helped, and I want to thank my constituents for allowing me to speak on their behalf.

I want to thank my family for putting up.... Well, actually, it might be a bonus for my family that I'm here often and they're at home. That could be a bonus, some would say.

Interjection.

B. Banman: Definitely a bonus? Yeah, yeah. It's a win-win, I guess, for them, right?

But I do want to thank my staff, and I want to thank, actually, the colleagues in this House. We don't agree on things, clearly. But if we do listen to one another, better is possible. I would remind us that the response to the throne speech, while prickly at times, is the very nature of democracy, and democracy is a wonderful and beautiful thing.

It's not perfect, but it's certainly better than some of the alternatives we see playing out in the other parts of the world and other regimes in the world. Today our party and, I'm sure, the government itself had the privilege of listening to some Iranians come in and speak. Compared to what's going on in that country, we're pretty damn lucky. We've got it good.

My grandparents, as you've heard once before, escaped the Russian revolution. They came from the part of Ukraine that was 15 kilometres from where the first bombs went in.

While we may get a little angry with one another, it's because we have a desire to make it better. I believe we can do that. I just think it takes a true, genuine desire to make it better. Together, with a few of the ideas that we've come up with and suggested to government, I think we can do exactly that. Instead of citizens being forced to help one another, government actually will be there in people's worst, darkest time of need and help them rebuild and help them get back up on their feet.

Thank you very much for the privilege to speak to this throne speech, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to what others have to say.

S. Furstenu: It's nice to hear the response to the throne speech end on a positive and hopeful note. Better is indeed possible, and democracy is something we

should all be occupied with. I have many of the same themes in my response. I'm delighted to have the opportunity to speak today on behalf of the people of my riding of Cowichan Valley.

[6:00 p.m.]

It's funny. It's the sixth year here, but this is the ninth throne speech I think we've heard. I did the counting. There were two in 2017 and two in 2020. New math, six equals nine.

[J. Tegart in the chair.]

I would say that I feel a great deal of clarity about a vision for this province. It's that that I'd like to share today in response to the Speech from the Throne on Monday. The more time I spend listening to British Columbians and learning about what ails and challenges people in my riding and in this province, the more I'm convinced that we are not measuring what really matters.

We have every opportunity in this province to create a society where everybody's needs are met; where we create the conditions necessary to thrive; where communities are connected, vibrant and safe; where our natural systems are healthy and resilient; and where our government and institutions are trustworthy and accountable.

For this to become our collective reality, I think we need to change how we measure success. We need to move beyond traditional economic indicators such as gross domestic product, GDP, and towards new outcomes that take human and environmental health into account.

For too long, GDP has been used as a measure of a country's economic success, but its limitations are costing us. GDP only measures market transactions and doesn't account for non-monetary activities. It doesn't consider inequality, unpaid labour or the health of the environment. This means that activities such as household work and volunteer work, which are essential for society's well-being, are not reflected in GDP. It doesn't take into account the distribution of income and wealth.

A high GDP may indicate a prosperous economy, but it does not tell us anything about how that prosperity is created or distributed. GDP does not consider how economic growth impacts the environment and the natural systems that we depend on for our survival. These shortfalls are evident in the forestry industry in this province. While forestry helped build B.C.'s economy, this economic growth led to the liquidation of the province's old growth and the loss of biodiversity in forests across B.C. Streams and creeks have been damaged by poor logging practices. Fish habitat and species, including salmon and steelhead, have been impacted.

Communities, too, have suffered from this unsustainable growth. Mills are now closing across this province due to a lack of access to trees. Roughly 100 mills have closed in B.C. in just 20 years. A high GDP may indicate a thriving market economy, but it does not tell us anything

about the quality of life, happiness, social and cultural well-being, and sense of belonging of a country's citizens.

The Speech from the Throne painted an overly optimistic picture of how British Columbians feel right now about their quality of life. It did not acknowledge the scale of issues facing British Columbians and, indeed, the world today. We have a new term, polycrisis. We are in a world of intersecting crises right now. We saw that in B.C. with a heat dome, with an atmospheric river and with a town that burned to the ground. We see how the costs of these climate change-driven events are translated into costs put on government, higher costs for people to live, a loss of food security and a loss of homes.

These crises are growing. The only way that we are going to find a path to this brighter future that we all want and that we're all here to try to deliver for our province is to be brutally honest about where we're at and then find the solutions. The solutions are very much to be found in the people of this province. But when government doesn't include people and the public's experience in their work, the public loses their trust in the government's leadership.

[6:05 p.m.]

I talk a lot about trust in government. It was a loss of trust in government that drove me into this place. It remains just such a vital thing that I want to see more of. I want people to trust government. I want people to trust institutions. All of us have a role to play in that.

The lack of trust is a global problem. The Edelman trust barometer is an annual survey that measures global trust levels across 28 countries and has since become one of the most widely cited measures of public trust. In 2021, their survey showed that global trust was the lowest it has been in the 20 years since they've been doing the survey. The survey found that transparency and purpose were two key factors in creating public trust. In other words, only when the public believes that their government is clear on its purpose and transparent in what it stands for will the public believe in its ability to effect change.

We need vision, and we need transparency. Those are how we rebuild trust. It's our duty as provincial leaders, especially at this critical time, to demonstrate that politics can and must be inspiring, hopeful and trusting. Government leadership must be forthcoming and transparent in how and why decisions are made.

There's no better example of this going wrong than the government's response to COVID-19. An independent review of the B.C. government's response to the pandemic revealed a lack of trust in the province's public health leaders. One of the main issues the report raised was a lack of proper communication and transparency. Sixty percent of respondents said that the information shared by the province about the pandemic was unclear and difficult to understand. Fewer than 20 percent of the respondents said they trusted the information.

The report states: "It is important that the reservoir of

trust be refilled in order for government to be prepared for the next provincewide emergency." We respond collectively when we believe that we are all in something together. When we lose that belief, it's very hard for us to come together and respond collectively to the situations around us.

I expect all of us are seeing and feeling this in our communities. We can no longer afford to continue to deplete the reservoir of trust. We have seen the effects of what happens when there is a real or even a perceived abuse of trust.

It should be our shared purpose to refill that reservoir. As leaders, we need to articulate a clear vision for our future that is aspirational and optimistic, where quality of life and the future matter, and then deliver, as best we can, on measurable outcomes that we have established.

My vision is clear. I believe that well-being should be placed at the centre of government decision-making. Orienting towards well-being provides a holistic approach to decision-making, to problem-solving, to delivering services and to building resilience.

Thankfully, we don't have to start from scratch in developing the framework. We can look to the innovative work of other jurisdictions, such as New Zealand and Scotland, for examples. In 2018, the New Zealand government launched a well-being budget that prioritizes the country's overall well-being in its budget decisions rather than just focusing on what we know is not sustainable, the story of endless economic growth.

The goal of the New Zealand well-being budget was to improve the living standards and well-being of citizens through targeted investments in five well-being priorities: improving mental health, reducing child poverty, supporting Maori and Pacific peoples, creating a sustainable environment and building strong communities. The well-being budget is a significant departure from New Zealand's traditional budgeting practices and represents a long-term commitment to putting the well-being of New Zealanders at the centre of government decision-making.

[6:10 p.m.]

It takes courage to make this kind of transformational change. In a province that measures its success by how much of its resources have been extracted and sold, with few proceeds going to its communities, this kind of change is going to take political will like we have never seen before. But unless our leadership shows this courage, we will continue to see the same outcomes in public health, the environment, our reliance on fossil fuels and a loss of trust.

Scotland is another country that has embraced well-being as a guiding principle for government decision-making. In 2017, the Scottish government published a National Performance Framework, NPF, that set out a vision for Scotland as a country where people can thrive and reach their full potential. The framework includes a set of national outcomes that focus on well-being, such as strong relationships, healthy lives and resilient communit-

ies. This is another transformational approach to policy-making that prioritizes the well-being of citizens and the environment.

The NPF includes a wide range of outcomes, from reducing child poverty to improving air quality, and is supported by a series of indicators that measure progress towards these outcomes. The framework also recognizes the interconnectedness of these outcomes and the need for a holistic approach to well-being that considers the impact of policy decisions on different parts of society.

Scotland's well-being legislation is also unique in its commitment to environmental sustainability. It aims to protect and enhance Scotland's natural resources, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote the use of renewable energy. It recognizes the important role that a healthy environment plays in supporting well-being and the need to tackle the root causes of environmental degradation.

Economist Mariana Mazzucato said of Scotland's well-being economy: "It is an innovative and forward-thinking approach to economic policy. By prioritizing the well-being of people and the environment, it has the potential to create a more sustainable, equitable and prosperous society."

This winter break we started a new initiative in our Third Party caucus. We call it Wisdom Wednesdays. Throughout the month of January, we invited in an expert in an area of interest to help our caucus and our staff understand better the challenges that we face. Our first session was with Peter MacLeod of Mass LBP. Peter shared his vision for, as he puts it, democracy's second act.

After years of working with the public in citizens' assemblies and other deliberative methods for decision-making, Peter has come to believe that the democratic exercise is not finished. Indeed, it has only just begun.

Yes, we need to acknowledge and celebrate free and fair elections, which the public fought for to get to the democratic outcomes we have today. But that fight for democracy isn't over, and that's where the public can continue to participate beyond the vote. As Peter puts it, we need to get our daring back. We need to aspire to something better than what we have today, to be unrelenting in our pursuit of a more democratic system.

It starts by saying yes to change. Yes, we can lower the voting age. Yes, we can debate and vote on and even pass private members' bills. And most critically, yes, we can make the public the centre of our decision-making.

I'm just going to take a small little detour here about private members' bills, because B.C. has a particularly undemocratic lack of interest in private members' bills. When we look at other provinces across Canada, we can see that private members' bills are actually a significant part of their debate and that bills are actually passed in their legislatures when they're brought forward not only by government members but by any member in the House. This is one way that we can strengthen democracy in this

House, a concrete way to ensure that we have better representation.

We have 87 members in this House, but only 22 of them can bring forward legislation and expect to see it pass in this building. In Alberta, once a week for three hours, private members' bills are debated. Upon introduction, those bills are referred to a parliamentary committee which recommends whether or not the bill should proceed. Alberta passes a lot of private members' bills.

[6:15 p.m.]

In the House of Commons, each sitting day for an hour there is private members' bills debate. In Manitoba, twice a week for two hours, private members' bills debated. New Brunswick, once a week for 3½ hours. Newfoundland and Labrador, once a week for two hours. Northwest Territories, part of Routine Business. Nova Scotia, once a week for 2½ hours. Ontario, three times a week for 45 minutes. P.E.I., twice a week for one hour, once a week for 1.5 hours. Quebec, once a week for two hours. Saskatchewan, once a week.

I've been in this House for almost six years, and we have had one hour of debate on a bill that has been brought forward by somebody who is not in government. One hour in six years. We can strengthen democracy in this place. We can strengthen representation. We do not want to go down the path of every government thinking: "Now that I've got a hold of power, how can I make it more autocratic? How do I take away the time of other members to be able to bring forward legislation that could improve things for British Columbians?"

This is not a battlefield. There are 87 of us elected to represent every British Columbian in this province, and 87 of us come with ideas from our communities, from people that we work with, ideas that are inspiring and hopeful, ideas that can make things better. Yet we don't even have the opportunity to debate private members' bills in this Legislature. We can do better.

Scotland — back to well-being. One of the key features of Scotland's well-being legislation is its focus on public participation and engagement. The Scottish government consults with citizens, communities and organizations on a regular basis to gather their views on what matters most for well-being and to assess progress towards the national outcomes. This helps to ensure that the framework remains relevant and responsive to changing needs and priorities.

For us to achieve these transformational changes in British Columbia, we also must look at how the public engages in our electoral process. No real change, I think, can really take place until the big-tent parties are put to the test in a system that allows for better representation of minority opinions and interests.

What do Scotland, New Zealand, Iceland, countries that have put well-being at the centre of their decision-making, have in common? In addition to all three of them, until a couple of weeks ago, being led by a woman Prime Minister,

they are all countries that elect their governments through proportional representation. Proportional representation ensures that smaller parties or minority groups are represented in the Legislature, even if they do not receive a majority of the votes.

Multiple parties must work together to form government, which, as we saw during the majority of the confidence and supply agreement, encourages compromise and cooperation. We would see a higher voter turnout, as voters feel that their vote will have a greater impact on the outcome of the election, and voters are encouraged to vote for their preferred party, rather than voting strategically for the lesser of two evils, as it's often framed.

Pro rep systems have been shown to lead to increased participation and greater representation of women and minorities in government, as parties are incentivized to include a diverse range of candidates on their lists. By ensuring all parties and groups receive representation in proportion to their support, PR systems lead to more stable, more accountable and more inclusive political process.

I was having a conversation about electoral reform a couple of weeks ago, and it's very hard to propose change to people. It's very difficult to say: "Hey, let's try this whole new thing." New Zealand did it by bringing in proportional representation and saying to the public: "After two election cycles, after you've tried this out, let's have a referendum." The referendum after two election cycles was overwhelmingly in favour of keeping proportional representation as their electoral system.

[6:20 p.m.]

I think if we were to look at the current situation we have, and we presented that as an option.... Let's just describe what we have right now. Well, we have a system in which just under 50 percent of the popular vote in the last election, in which just over 50 percent of people voted.... About one in four eligible voters delivered a very significant majority to one party in this province, 57 out of 87 seats. Twenty-five percent of eligible voters, two-thirds of the seats in the Legislature. A lot of people clearly didn't even want to come out and vote in an election, which is the one thing that we consider to be part of our democracy that everybody can participate in.

When the results come in.... Ontario took it to a whole new level where something like 17 percent of eligible voters elected a massive majority of the Conservative Party in Ontario. What this incentivizes is actually voter suppression, because if a party can win a big majority with a few — the number of voters — then it's easier to get that small number of voters out than it is to try to appeal to the whole population. So we weaken democracy. We make it thinner.

I think that if we were to ask ourselves: "How could we collectively best serve the people of this province?" I think we would agree that the combative, adversarial kind of standard operations in here, the tightly scripted approach

that we have, the very controlled agenda, is not actually us at our best. We can do better. I really believe it.

We can do better on so many fronts. We don't use our committees the way that they should be used. We don't have debate in here that is really transformative. We very rarely see amendments to legislation happen on the floor.

Even worse, we are getting to the point where it's becoming normal that significant pieces of legislation are passed through this House without proper process, especially committee stage debate. We have seen this with the changes to freedom of information. We saw this with changes to the forestry legislation. We saw this with housing bills, and we saw this with Bill 36 in November.

I think all of us, every one of us, should consider that a failure on our part to do our jobs as legislators. We should not think that's okay — that that has become more and more common practice of legislation coming through this place without even the opportunity for the most basic level of scrutiny at committee stage.

It's shameful. It weakens democracy. It breaks trust, and it creates voids. It creates vacuums into which people can insert their biggest fears. We have a growing problem with people being afraid of what government is doing, with growing conspiracy theories. We contribute to it when we pass legislation that hasn't been properly scrutinized, debated, understood and amended.

That's our job. That's our one job. More and more, it's becoming normal in this chamber that we don't get to do that job.

I think we should do better. I think that should be a commitment from any government. Particularly, we have a new government. We have a new Premier. I hope that he will commit to proper legislative debate in this House.

[6:25 p.m.]

I'll just point out that I will be the designated speaker, Madam Speaker, for this throne speech response.

Back to well-being. I really do believe that all governments, but in particular this government, must ensure that the well-being of people, communities and our environment are at the centre of our decision-making. In B.C., this means ensuring that housing, health care, public transit are designed with disabled people in mind. It means ensuring alerts are in place when the next heat dome hits and that disabled and low-income people have access to air conditioners and cooling centres or, as the case is right now, to warming centres.

To ensure we're building a society that includes everyone, we must value and consider all bodies, all abilities. Again, we can look to New Zealand for a strong example of the benefits of a well-being approach to decision-making and budgeting. In 2022, the government established a new ministry for disabled people to create better options for disabled people and their families and to increase funding for community-based services.

Here in B.C., disabled people are expected to live on \$1,400 a month or less. They're discouraged from being

able to co-habitate with the people they love. We have a punitive system when it comes to supporting people with disabilities and people on income assistance. We can do so much better.

If we made decisions with the well-being of the environment and communities and people at the centre, we would stop exporting raw logs. We would stop cutting primary forest for the wood pellet industry. We would invest in creating an innovative, sustainable forestry industry that adds values and jobs in local communities and leaves us less vulnerable to boom-and-bust cycles.

The use of well-being as a lens for decision-making and outcome measurement helps us to ensure that policies and initiatives align with the values and priorities of the people they are designed to serve. By focusing on well-being, governments can ensure that their decisions have a positive impact on people's lives, rather than just boosting economic indicators.

Well-being is a powerful lens through which government can make decisions and measure its outcomes. By embracing it as a guiding principle, governments can ensure that their decisions align with these values and promote a holistic and inclusive approach to decision-making. As the examples of New Zealand and Scotland show, well-being can be a transformative force for government, helping to create a better future for all people.

Our vision for British Columbia is one where everybody's needs are met. They have the necessary conditions to thrive. Communities are connected, vibrant and safe. Our natural systems are healthy, resilient. Our government and institutions are trustworthy and accountable. Our well-being now and into the future depends on the decisions we make today, and that's why we believe that well-being should inform decision-making and budgeting in this province.

We must ask ourselves as a society: what do we value, and how do we measure outcomes in relationship to those values? We manage what is measured. For too long we have used GDP and economic growth as the measure of success. But as we can see, our society isn't healthy if it isn't working for the majority of people nor for the ecosystems we rely on.

Measuring and reporting on well-being over time would allow us to gain a clearer picture of the overall health of the province, from mental health and community safety to the state of housing and our natural environment. We can identify our natural assets and recognize areas where challenges remain. We can have discussions about the province we want to be and the actions that we need to take to get there.

New Zealand just released its first well-being report. The one thing that stood out for me at the outset, when I started to read it, was I felt like I was getting an honest assessment of where things were at. It wasn't a report from government that says that everything is awesome. It said,

"Here's where we're not doing very well," because they're measuring.

[6:30 p.m.]

What that does, what that enables a government, and I mean all of the institutions in government, to be able to do is to say: "Well, now we know where we have to make better investments. Now we know where we're not reaching the outcomes we want to reach." In New Zealand, these were around housing. They were around youth mental health, child poverty.

Assessing your government's work and your budget's work in this way is a guidebook for how to serve better. Because if we're only measuring GDP, well, then the atmospheric rivers coming in and destroying transportation infrastructure, which cost billions of dollars to repair, were good for GDP. I cannot think that is a reasonable way to measure our success of our economy, our society.

There are jurisdictions that are purposefully, intentionally orienting themselves to well-being. We can do this here in British Columbia. We can lead by orienting ourselves to what really matters. We believe that people should be at the centre of our decision-making. This strengthens democracy. At this crucial moment where public trust, inequality and overlapping crises are increasing, we must make a choice about the purpose of government.

By valuing and measuring well-being, we have an opportunity to reimagine, not just government but politics in our province, and to build a better and more hopeful future for British Columbians.

S. Chant: Thank you for the opportunity to rise in support of the 2023 throne speech. As always, it's my honour to speak to the thoughtful and articulate words of our Lieutenant-Governor.

To begin, I acknowledge that I am speaking on the lands of the Lək̓ʷəŋjɪŋəŋ, specifically those of the Songhees and Esquimalt speaking people.

Additionally, I acknowledge the unceded territory of the Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations where my home and riding are situated. It is indeed a privilege to work, learn and live on those territories that have been and continue to be stewarded for so long and so well.

I also want to echo the thanks of one of the proceeding speakers to the farmers. You know, spring comes around and things happen, and the work that they have done to make this spring happen again — in a way that is productive and functional and supports our province, supports our food chain, supports our food security — is critical. I want to acknowledge and echo that thanks to our farmers, because they are very, very critical, also, to our province and to the way things go.

I also wish to express gratitude to the people of North Vancouver–Seymour who have entrusted me with the role of representing them and advocating on their behalf as

their MLA. This role is significantly enhanced because of the exemplary work of my constituency office staff who maintain, on a day-to-day basis, service and support for the public of my community. They also ensure that people have access to speak to me directly about issues and concerns, as well as keeping me abreast of, and participating in, meaningful events.

My office has been a venue for art displays that showcase local artists, a meeting place for guiding units that are exploring leadership and politics and a place of celebration. The backbone of that office is my staff. Eli, Michael, Heather: thank you. Thank you so much for your dedication to the well-being of everyone that you meet.

Of course I must never forget the ongoing support that I get from my husband, Rick; my daughters, Lindsey and Nicole; my son-in-law, Troy; our friend, Rebecca; and many other families, members and friends. All of these folks provide me with the ongoing stamina to do the work that I am now fully engaged in.

[6:35 p.m.]

I believe a lot was accomplished in 2022, with 2023 holding continued promise. Many people, organizations, agencies and ministries worked together towards milestones, several of which had been on the horizon for years and have now become reality — milestones which have had and will continue to have significant positive impact on the people of British Columbia.

As I listened to presentations at the First Nations Leadership Council, I heard of progress being made in the work of truth and reconciliation. Understandings were being reached, agreements made and initiatives undertaken. A historic swearing-in ceremony was done in partnership with the Musqueam, an event not seen in the past and one that will be a treasured and unique memory for many of us. Government-to-government discussions are being generated and expected in policy planning and decisions. As time unfolds, so will all of these collaborations, as we continue to grow and understand these relationships.

At the Union of British Columbia Municipalities, I heard from so many community representatives who were thrilled at how accessible the provincial government was to them on so many issues. There were also references made to the number of MLAs that were attending the event, ready to listen and help in problem-solving, ready to be there at receptions and talk informally, ready to be there in ministry meetings to support their constituents as they brought things forward.

We've had members of so many organizations — non-profits, public service, industry, business and technology, to name but a few. They've provided presentations about what they do, how they do it, who does it and why it is needed. All of these entities are focused on people and how life can be better for folks in British Columbia.

Particularly impactful for me has been the vast range of culture and faith groups that do so many things to support newcomers, recent immigrants and those who have come

to British Columbia over the past decades, some measured in generations or even centuries.

The variety of programs, language options and helping groups that support and strengthen the diversity of our province is astounding, and those offerings are taking place. All of them are in cradle to grave. Mother and infant drop-ins, language support towards employment, helping seniors get online, ensuring that funds are available for culturally appropriate funerals — all of these amazing offerings and many more are there because needs were recognized and met by groups who understand the nuances and experiences of those they serve.

So many of these groups have come to Victoria either in person or virtually to make sure their government understands the contributions their agencies make to the people, communities and networks that make up our province. Health care, legal support, recreation, technology, small and large businesses, industry, education, Indigenous enterprises, sports, safety — all offering economic, social and cultural infrastructure that is strength and support to our communities. Seeing all of these efforts makes me understand more deeply why I am so lucky and so proud to be part of a British Columbia that works hard in so very many ways to meet the needs of everyone.

Similar to all the organizations I have referenced earlier, our government strives in so many ways to hear from the people of our province to determine needs, gaps and oversights as well as to recognize areas that have perhaps been addressed but need more work. In the spirit of collaboration, we continue to reach out to those who could be or are impacted by plans and decisions to ensure voices are already at the table to address those impacts. Positive steps are celebrated and built upon; others are reviewed and revised until the desired outcomes are realized. Mandate letters start the process at each ministry, outlining expectations and areas of focus, emphasizing the need for ministries to work together.

The throne speech provides a strong and flexible base for the government and legislators to reference as they continue to work with representatives and constituents to strengthen and enhance the everyday lives of people living in British Columbia. For the definition of this work, we'll come out with a budget for 2023-24, as will be outlined later in this session.

[6:40 p.m.]

And of course this work has already been ongoing throughout all levels of our provincial government, actively demonstrated through determination of our Premier to address the complexity of the multiple challenges that face not only B.C. but also Canada and, in fact, the world.

Climate change. Environmental impact. Health care. Housing. Accessibility. Cost of living. Mental health. Transportation. Connectivity. Racism. Education. Child care. Public safety. All of these areas, and many more, are the subject of discussions and actions throughout our province. All of these areas also are being addressed

through the overarching lens of establishing, supporting and sustaining government-to-government relationships with the Indigenous people of B.C.

I watched in the Hall of Honour as housing agreements were announced with some of our northern coastal First Nations. I listened as Truth and Reconciliation Day was brought before the House to be made an ongoing recognition. I heard the negotiations to ensure that Indigenous communities would have oversight as to who was hunting on the traditional territories and as to who was minding their children. I looked at the beautiful work done by the members of the Qualicum band in creating over 60 teaching kits for classrooms, each with items and ideas to allow kids to increase their knowledge of the traditional ways.

I celebrated with teachers and school trustees when K-to-12 Indigenous content was integrated into the B.C. school systems and syllabus. I enjoyed visiting the child care centre on Tsleil-Waututh Nation, a place of cheerful kids and proud staff. I paddled with Takaya Tours, who took us up Burrard Inlet and told stories of ancestors, how they lived and thrived. And I am just one person.

All of these experiences over the past year have reinforced the knowledge that we all benefit from walking the trail of truth and reconciliation together, lifting each other up with shared strength.

My community was lucky enough to be one of the original pilots for PACT, the peer assisted crisis team. Through the auspices of the Canadian Mental Health Association, they set up a service to support individuals dealing with mental health escalations as an alternative to calling the police or an ambulance. These are folks who go into a situation, assess and are often able to de-escalate someone who is experiencing a mental health break. So far they've got about a 70 percent success rate, which is diverting folks from both the police and the hospitals.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Nice to see you, Mr. Speaker.

They are also providing support to families and caregivers. I have a senior in my riding who has an adult son in his fifties that has dealt with a significant mental health diagnosis all of his life. He's been in and out of several establishments with various levels of support and clinical staff. Now he's living with his mom, in her late 70s, and sometimes it's working okay. However, sometimes things are not going that well, for a variety of reasons. PACT took her call, came out and met her son and provided support for both of them. They're now an expanded part of the network that these folks can access when times get tougher.

PACT was also there when a new immigrant was burned out of her home in Lynn Valley and was so distraught that she felt her only option was to commit suicide. They helped her through working with her in her own language, assuring her that she was safe, and reas-

suring her that there were available options and help was available to her.

These types of actions involve a level of skill, compassion and confidence that in the past were not available outside of a clinical setting, and certainly, not outside of regular working hours. The PACT is only one example of many actions that have been implemented to support people who are dealing with mental health problems. Mobile teams, such as we have in North Van, where police and clinicians go together on a call that has mental health overtones....

Another resource, which is focused on youth mental health, is the many Foundries that are located throughout various parts of our province, where young people can go for one-stop mental health and health provision. These services are provided through programs and outreach, as well as on an individual basis. Our construction industry has recognized the risk and death toll that is associated with the toxic drug emergency and also has stepped up to contribute towards mitigating this crisis.

[6:45 p.m.]

Tailgate talks, focused on supporting other members of one's crew, are offering educational support around topics such as the danger of using alone, purchasing illicit drugs that are laced with toxins, how to use naloxone, drug-testing options, stigma reduction and many other discussions that allow an open dialogue about issues that have never been addressed in the past.

Supportive housing, from simple to complex care, has opened and continues to be opening in various parts of the province. B.C. is leading the country again, like they did with Insite, in implementing decriminalization of the possession of certain drugs for personal use only. This is another step towards reducing stigma and taking drug addiction and usage out of the criminal realm and into the realm of health and mental health.

Pathway to Hope has laid a strong foundation, with many of the support structures, strategies and programs coming online, and more to come, to address the mental health needs of our province. Once again working together with people in communities and seeing the tangible results of this work.

I have worked in the field of health care since the mid-1980s and have been a witness to the roller-coaster that health care professionals and care providers have been on in that time. The result of dramatic cuts in the funding during the early 2000s became extraordinarily evident with the onset of COVID. A number of steps have been taken, across the board, to strengthen and rebuild our system of health care.

In nursing, over 600 new seats were opened so that B.C. could increase the number of nurses graduating from our own training programs. Work has been done with the college, union and professional body to speed up the process of getting internationally trained nurses qualified and registered to practise. These nurses bring skills, cul-

tural knowledge and languages with them, enhancing the diversity and breadth of care offered to patients. Additionally, financial support is being made available as the cost of the process to qualify here has been a barrier for many who eventually give up on nursing as their career.

Nurse practitioners and registered nurses are working at full scope of practice providing specialized care in a whole variety of areas, including management of substance use.

SFU is getting a new medical school, again so that we can graduate doctors from our own training programs. Internationally trained doctors now have more access to mechanisms that allow them to begin practising in B.C., with more to come. Family doctors are embracing a new funding mechanism that recognizes the complexity of general practice and the cost of running such a practice.

We have more ambulances, with greater coverage on shifts, and more regular staffing models in place. Education funding is becoming available for paramedics, with an emphasis on people being trained and working in their own local communities.

New hospitals are being built and new technologies implemented. Legislation is being updated to reflect the current and future health care in our province. It will continue to improve with work, collaboration and a willingness on the part of all of us.

Last fall I had the opportunity to play with kids at Lynnmour Elementary School in my riding. We were celebrating the opening of a new accessible playground at their school, one which the kids had a hand in designing. They were so excited and so proud to show me the different features, and we tried all of them. Yes, I played, too, in a dress and all.

One of the things that has been re-emphasized during COVID is the value of being outdoors. We could never overemphasize the value of physical play. We have the ever-winning combination of play at school, which has been shown, for generations, to benefit the learning capacities of our kids.

Mr. Speaker, you may wonder what playgrounds have to do with throne speeches. I'm sure others in the House are having the same queries.

Well, here's the connection. When my kids were in elementary school and a new playground was needed, we spent several years fundraising and had to source a corporate partner to ensure a comprehensive range of play equipment. Additionally, families did the construction work — under the close supervision of professionals, of course — to defray the cost. By the time it was built, several sets of parents, who were active and effective in fundraising, had their kids in high school and did not necessarily see the benefit of their efforts.

Whereas last fall at Lynnmour Elementary.... Their

playground, like many throughout the province, was funded by the provincial government, a government that recognizes the importance of all people having access to the tools to be involved and engaged in our society and makes sure that accessibility is a significant part of every framework.

[6:50 p.m.]

In the coming year, our government will continue to do the good work that puts people of our province first, work to buffer them from the cost of living by reducing child care costs, by offering rebates on vehicle insurance, by keeping auto insurance the same for the next two years, by giving credit on hydro bills to families and in a myriad of other ways.

Work towards reducing and mitigating climate change through strengthening environmental protections and proactively preparing for adverse weather, climate and geophysical events. Setting up year-round centres that maintain regular teams to manage floods, freshets and fires. Working with communities to develop or enhance safety plans and reduce risk factors.

Work in expanding training resources for health providers and establishing mechanisms to support internationally trained nurses and physicians to be able to work in our communities successfully and raise their families there. Work in mental health to meet the needs of children, youth, adults and seniors with culturally and trauma-informed practices and resources that reflect the diversity of our client population.

Why is this work being done? Because it's needed, on an ongoing and methodical basis, to continue to make things better for the people of British Columbia. Our government will continue that work because we are all in the corner of the people of British Columbia every day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity to rise in support of the Speech from the Throne.

Noting the hour, I move adjournment of the debate.

S. Chant moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. R. Kahlon moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

The House adjourned at 6:52 p.m.

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