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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

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Honourable Raj Chouhan

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MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27, 2023

The House met at 1:33 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Routine Business

Introductions by Members

T. Wat: Before I make my introduction, I would like to thank the Speaker for allowing me extra time to do my introduction.

It's my honour to welcome the largest-ever Buddhism delegation, with more than 120 members, to our B.C. Legislature today. Only 90 of them — we are so grateful — could be seated here, and the remaining will be watching the live stream from the Ned DeBeck Lounge. I guess it's time that we have to expand the seats in the public gallery.

Among the delegation are 47 Buddhism masters from 14 different temples, from different schools of Buddhism from China, Taiwan, Tibet, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Vietnam and Burma. Please bear with me for naming just one master representative from each of the 14 temples to show our respect and gratitude for their visit to this people's House. They are:

[1:35 p.m.]

Venerable Siriniwasa Kumbalgoda from the Buddhist Vihara Society in B.C., from Sri Lanka.

Venerable Ashin Ghosaka from the Burmese Buddhist Society.

Venerable Chaowanut Upasamo from the Dhammakaya International Meditation Society of B.C., from Thailand.

Venerable Sommai Robteck from the Buddhapanyan-untararama Buddhist Monastery, from Thailand.

Venerable Minh Truyen from Chan Nguyen Monastery, from Vietnam.

Master Tri Thong from Phap Hoa Temple, from Vietnam.

Venerable Lu Shen Shih from the Potalaka Temple, the Bilingual Buddhist Association, from China.

Master Shi Xing Wu from Xing Wu Zen Temple Society of Canada, from China.

Venerable Xin Miao Shih from Fu Hui Temple, from China.

Reverend Grant Ikuta from Steveston Buddhist Temple, from Japan.

Venerable Gyatso Khechok Rinpoche from the Land of Compassion Buddha, from Tibet.

Venerable Khenpo Choeday from the H. E. Palyal Lhatul Rinpoche Buddhist Society, from Tibet.

Venerable Lama Tenzin from KKC Niguma Meditation Centre, from Tibet.

Venerable Tsengdok Rinpoche from the Tsengdok Mon-

astery Canada, from Tibet, organized today's largest-ever Buddhism delegation.

Last but not least is Master Diana Ko, founder and president of Bai Gong International Buddhist Society.

The 14 Buddhism masters will perform a dharma blessing ceremony at the Hall of Honour later in the afternoon to bless all MLAs and all the staff working in this historic building and their families to make sure they lead a happy, healthy and safe life so that we all can deliver the best services to British Columbians.

The purpose of the delegation's visit is to raise awareness about the Buddhist universal teachings of generosity, compassion and selfless contributions and services. Could you help contribute to building a stronger, fairer and more inclusive province and country?

Please join me in giving the biggest round of applause to this Buddhism delegation.

Hon. D. Eby: Thank you to the member of the opposition. Let me take the opportunity on behalf of the government caucus, as the Premier of B.C., to welcome the largest Buddhist delegation to our House of parliament.

It is a great celebration to have you here today. This is your place. This is the place of all British Columbians. The message of compassion and generosity that Buddhism brings to the world is one that I'm sure you'll see on display today in question period as we ask each other questions and give answers. [Laughter.]

Interjection.

Hon. D. Eby: There's an example right there.

I want to say thank you so much for coming to visit us, and welcome. On behalf of all the government caucus, we hope you come and visit again. Welcome to Victoria.

L. Doerkson: It gives me a great sense of pride today to introduce to you all a woman who, for 2½ decades, has given me so many opportunities of joyous time together. She is an incredibly kind, generous being, but she is a fierce advocate for the underdog.

She's an RN. She works in Prince George at the cancer centre. She's my daughter Miranda Doerkson, and she's an incredible woman.

Would you please welcome her here today.

S. Furstenu: Just on behalf of the B.C. Green caucus, I also want to say welcome to the Buddhist delegation here today.

It's a delight to see all of you in the gallery, and we look forward to seeing the ceremony this afternoon. Thank you so much for coming.

[1:40 p.m.]

Hon. L. Popham: Today I have some very special guests joining us here in the chamber. First off, my fiancé of six

years, six years engaged. Our kids are getting sick and tired of waiting for us to get married. In fact, they're now starting to get married before us.

First off, my son Kye married his wonderful wife, Enya. They eloped after Christmas. I didn't even get invited, on the record.

Now, in the chamber, we have my stepdaughter Paige and her wonderful fiancé, Lloyd Flay. They are flying out of here tomorrow morning to get married in Las Vegas by Elvis.

Just a heads-up to everyone here that I am also going to Las Vegas, so no questions for me on Thursday.

H. Yao: I also want to take a moment to welcome all the Buddhist delegates, especially all of you who have been doing a phenomenal job promoting inclusivity, diversity and humane treatment of animals. Thank you so much for your teaching.

I also want to take a moment to say welcome to Lina Liang from Xing Wu Zen Temple Society. I know she used to be a Lions Club member as well. I especially want to welcome her as well.

Hon. A. Dix: As you know well, the Hospital Employees Union are fierce advocates for health care workers and for public health care. We're honoured to have in the gallery Meena Brisard, their secretary-business manager, and Caelie Frampton, their director of communications.

I wish everyone in the House to give them a great welcome.

S. Bond: I want to update the House. Last week I introduced the House to Joel Ewart, who was a member of the Team B.C. wheelchair basketball team. I am thrilled to tell you that for the first time in Canada Games history, Joel Ewart and Team B.C. won gold at the Canada Games in P.E.I. They defeated Alberta 79 to 32.

Congratulations to Joel and Team B.C.

Hon. M. Dean: Recently it was the birthday of retired leading bandsperson Bud Kellett. He actually turned 102 years old. He's the oldest living member of the Naden Band of the Royal Canadian Navy.

Would everybody please send him many happy returns.

Tributes

ROBERT AND GAYLE FEARNLEY

Hon. B. Ma: I rise today on behalf of both the member for Vancouver-Kensington and myself to honour the lives of Bob Jerningham Fearnley and Gayle Elizabeth Fearnley.

I didn't have the privilege of knowing Bob when he served as city of North Vancouver councillor for 15 years, between 1996 and 2011. But that is not to say I didn't know Bob when he served our community, because even after he

was no longer a councillor, he stayed extremely involved and committed in our community. He often referred to himself as a forever-recovering politician. In his work as councillor, he is known for his role in developing the Lonsdale Energy Corp., the city of North Vancouver library, the North Shore's drug policy and much, much more.

He was also a doting husband and father. Born on April 29, 1953, Bob was killed in a residential fire on February 9, alongside his daughter Gayle Elizabeth Fearnley, who had celebrated her 29th birthday just weeks prior. She brought light into the lives of everyone who knew her, and she had her whole life ahead of her.

Bob and Gayle leave behind their wife and mother Via, as well as their sons and brothers, Paolo and Bob Jr.

[1:45 p.m.]

Introductions by Members

K. Paddon: I would invite everyone to please make welcome my guest today, Marlon Hall. He is here from the Chilliwack Chamber of Commerce. He was director of the year, so kind of a big deal. As well, he is with Metric Civil Contractors Ltd.

Would the House please join me in making Marlon very welcome.

N. Simons: I just noticed in the gallery a couple of residents of the qathet regional district, Dr. David and Janet May. It's always nice to welcome constituents to this place.

It's quite a bit of a trek, but I welcome you to the chamber, and I hope you enjoy your visit. I look forward to speaking to you later.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

BILL M212 — BUDDHIST CULTURE DAY ACT

T. Wat presented a bill intituled Buddhist Culture Day Act.

T. Wat: I move that the bill intituled the Buddhist Culture Day Act, 2023, of which notice has been given in my name on the order paper, be introduced and read for the first time now.

This bill proposes a declaration of the first Sunday in May as Buddhist Culture Day to honour and celebrate the rich diversity of British Columbia and the many practising Buddhists in the province.

This day would coincide with the Buddhist celebration of Vesak, which signifies the birth, enlightenment and death of the Buddha and is a special time for celebration, meditation and reflection for many Buddhists across B.C.

Today we are honoured to be joined by a delegation of more than 100 — actually, it's more than 120 — British Columbian Buddhists from various backgrounds, includ-

ing China, Tibet, Taiwan, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam and Japan, to celebrate a day where this proposal is made to the B.C. Legislature.

Their presence here today is not only a testament to the prevalence of Buddhism across borders but also to the incredible work we have done so far as a society to achieve such a multi-ethnic and inclusive province that has embraced those from all over the globe.

Buddhist Culture Day would acknowledge a large number of practising Buddhist British Columbians — more than 90,000, according to Statistics Canada — as well as those that are of Buddhist culture, and help dedicate a day to build awareness of one of the many components of our colourful society.

As we do with other faiths, cultures and traditions, I hope this House supports my call to celebrate, honour and raise awareness of the Buddhist way of life, cultural identity and religion through the Buddhist Culture Day Act.

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

Motion approved.

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

Bill M212, Buddhist Culture Day 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.

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

COMMERCIAL FISHING INDUSTRY IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

J. Rice: Commercial fishing is one of the founding industries of this province, and its significance can be found painted on the ceilings of the B.C. Legislature, along with representations of the mining, forestry and agricultural industries.

The fishing sector is a cornerstone in the economic and social fabric of B.C.'s coast, and fishing and fish processing is deeply rooted in our history and our culture. But fishing communities are struggling, and fishermen nowadays are unfairly portrayed as the perpetrators of all negative impacts to fish. In fact, many influences, including fisheries mismanagement, poor policies, warming oceans and habitat destruction all impact global fisheries.

First Nations make up the vast majority of commercial fishermen on the north and Central Coast and Haida Gwaii, and they rely on good stewardship for food, social and ceremonial purposes as well as income.

[1:50 p.m.]

Every year fewer rural fisherman can go commercial fishing. Older fishermen who want to retire from fishing find that they can't sell their licences at a reasonable price. Younger fishermen can't afford to buy in to the more lucrative fisheries, primarily owned by multinational corporations. The cost to buy a licence or quota is in the hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars.

Northern and rural shoreworkers are also seeing processing move to the Lower Mainland or to Asia. However, globally, fishing is increasingly providing more value to communities, even though we may be catching less fish.

Independent fish harvesters need protections to rebuild the backbone of the rural middle class along our coast. We can promote policies that support local fishermen to benefit from B.C. resources and shoreworking employment in coastal communities with adjacency policies like those found in the forestry sector. Rural community benefits can be achieved through offering fishermen or communities control over access to fish.

While there may be limited awareness of commercial fishing among the general public, it remains a mainstay of rural coastal economies, many of which are First Nations communities that have lived and fished the coast for millennia.

HOLLYBURN CABINS ON CYPRESS MOUNTAIN

K. Kirkpatrick: This fall I had the pleasure of touring the Hollyburn cabins way up on Cypress Mountain with the Hollyburn Ridge Association president, Jackie Swanson.

Our adventure started at the Nordic parking lot on Cypress Park, where Jackie gave me a brief history of the cabins. We then hiked into the Nordic ski trails, which probably wasn't that far, but it felt like we went a really long way. The snow hadn't fallen yet, or otherwise snowshoes and cross-country skis would be the only way to access these cabins.

The first cabins were constructed in the late 1920s by Scandinavian immigrants to support the newly established Hollyburn Pacific Ski Club at First Lake. By 1930, there were over 200 cabins on the mountain in this vibrant ski community. It's like stepping back in time. The cabins have no power, no services and largely no access roads. Those using the cabins actually have to carry everything in with them when they access them.

Over the decades, the existence of the cabins on Cypress Mountain has not been without controversy, which is why, in 1973, cabin owners concerned about the future of these heritage cabins and their cherished cabin community formed the Hollyburn Ridge Association. Their goals were preservation, encouragement of recreational use and public access and their desire to negotiate with all levels of government, when necessary, to save these important cabins.

Today Jackie reports there are 108 active cabins, 104 in the district of West Vancouver and four on B.C. Parks land.

If you have an opportunity to come up onto Cypress and see these wonderful cabins and enjoy some great history in the district of West Vancouver, we invite you to do so.

CITY DREAM CENTRE SOCIETY

M. Starchuk: A number of weeks ago I had the opportunity to tour City Dream Centre. I had met with the founder of City Dream Centre, Loretta Hibbs, in my office a few weeks prior to that, to hear the dream. When I heard that, I knew I had to go tour the building and their thrift store.

City Dream Centre's mandate is to bridge the gap between homelessness, addiction, prison and poverty to self-sustainability.

Their adopt-a-school program works closely with local schools and school districts to provide support to high-needs schools, including food security support; 3,500 wrapped Christmas gifts every year; mobile dental care; preteen mentoring programs helping equip at-risk kids against gangs and traffickers; hygiene packs for grade 6 and 7 students, including feminine hygiene products, 1,800 packs delivered twice each school year; new and used school clothing; annual back-to-school events with 1,000 backpacks; free kids' haircuts; produce bags; free family clothing; and other kids activities.

Their education programs are parenting, boundaries and anger management. They're taught in local recovery homes, shelters and both provincial and federal prisons, helping to reunite families.

City Care Dental is a three-chair mobile dental unit bringing much-needed care to kids in their adopted schools, as well as seniors and other needs kids in the Lower Mainland. Some of these kids as young as four have never seen a dentist in their entire life. These mobile units will reach out there to give them the dental care that they need.

[1:55 p.m.]

Looking forward to the dream, they're looking at low-income families who are struggling to pay high rent and food costs and age kids out of foster care. Their goal is to provide housing, food and child care for up to the years, while assisting them to complete post-secondary certificates or diploma programs that will improve their self-sustainability.

I want to make sure that everybody here understands that City Dream Centre is actually a dream for the future of the people inside the city of Surrey.

CATTLE RANCHING AND WORK OF MURRAY AND CHERYL RICHARDS

M. Morris: Murray and Cheryl Richards raise cattle northwest of Prince George. This winter Murray feeds close to 200 pregnant cows, 165 calves from last year, 30

replacement heifers and eight registered bulls. He uses some of the 1,800 round bales of hay and 300 bales of silage that he and Cheryl spent 18-hour days baling last summer.

Murray's animal husbandry skills, developed over a lifetime of raising beef, are put to the test every day. Forty new calves have already been born, and they're expecting another 145 — no small feat in February, with the blizzards and cold weather we're experiencing.

This Monday over 30 centimetres snow fell in a few short hours, temporarily diverting his time helping Cheryl get the truck out of the yard and out to the highway, pulling neighbours out and plowing driveways. By the end of last week, temperatures had plummeted to minus 40 with the windchill factored in.

But calves don't wait. Murray makes routine checks every two hours around the clock, managing only 14 hours of sleep in the last five days. Besides checking on new calves, he must keep water troughs open from freezing up, provide extra bedding for calves and even bring the odd one into the House to warm up with blankets and the heater and a tablespoon of raw honey.

He's had to extract four calves so far this season. Again, not unexpected, as over the years, he has learned to expect that about 5 percent of birthing cows need assistance to deliver their calves. Some calves need help to start nursing, and he and Cheryl provide bottle feeding or stomach tube feeding to those calves three to four times a day.

Murray and Cheryl wouldn't have it any other way. They understand the critical role farmers play in maintaining and enhancing food security in our province.

There are hundreds of families across the province who are doing the same thing, and we are most appreciative for all that they do for us.

B.C. WINTER GAMES IN GREATER VERNON

H. Sandhu: I am super excited to share that in 23 days, 15 hours and two minutes, amazing and welcoming people in my spectacular constituency of Vernon-Monashee will welcome athletes, coaches, parents, families and guests from across the province for the upcoming B.C. Winter Games.

It is a great source of pride that the 2023 B.C. Winter Games will be hosted in my home region, greater Vernon. We have been eagerly awaiting these games after they were postponed in 2022, due to the pandemic. Now the games are finally happening from March 23 to March 26.

For most of these athletes, these games will be their first experience competing in a multisport environment. For others, these games are an important journey towards national and international competitions. I applaud every athlete for their perseverance, patience, passion and dedication to their craft.

It is vital to remember that behind every youth there is a

supportive family, flexible educators, mentors and fantastic coaches. To all of you, I want to extend my gratitude.

I am so grateful to all the sponsors and incredible volunteers who have been selflessly donating their time and energy for the last two years. Volunteers are involved in every aspect of planning the games. The board of directors said that as many as 2,000 volunteers will be needed to host the B.C. Winter Games. To those interested in helping, I encourage you to all please sign up on the B.C. Games website.

These games will generate great social and economic returns, foster community connectedness and provide a boost to our tourism and business sectors.

I encourage all members of this House to cheer for all the talent at the upcoming B.C. Winter Games and also to come join us to cheer them on in person, if you can, and see what wonderful offerings Vernon-Monashee has to offer. We'll welcome you with open arms.

[2:00 p.m.]

DISASTER RECOVERY IN FRASER-NICOLA AREA

J. Tegart: I'd like to take a little time and give the House an update on my riding post-disaster. You could rightfully ask which disaster, as we've had wildfires, atmospheric rivers, floods and landslides.

Please know how much we appreciate the work and the commitment of those on the ground doing their best to assist in the recovery efforts. But I think we all have to acknowledge that a great many people get left behind as time goes on.

All the major routes to the interior of B.C. run through my riding, and the atmospheric river left no road untouched. Along Highway 8, ranchers experienced wildfires, floods and landslides, all within one year. People lost their properties. The provincial supply routes were seriously affected, and people became aware of just how vulnerable we are as a province. Wildfires burned hectares of land and burned the village of Lytton to the ground. Volunteers stepped up to support, and on top of all this, we were still dealing with COVID.

Much attention and announcements from government and media in the first few months, but now, 12 to 24 months later, roadwork closures and single-lane traffic continue. The residents of Lytton are nowhere near to be coming home. Ranchers affected by wildfires, flooding and landslides struggle to get assistance. Merritt residents are still displaced due to the atmospheric river over 12 months ago. Community leaders are often overwhelmed trying to assist their residents and community.

What is clear to me and to everyone who has been affected by the disaster is we're not prepared to deal with these catastrophic events. There is so much to be learned and so much more work to do.

The constituents of Fraser-Nicola ask you to learn from us, and please, please do not forget us.

Oral Questions

ADDICTION TREATMENT AND RECOVERY SERVICES

E. Sturko: In 2018, the B.C. Centre on Substance Use released a report called *Strategies to Strengthen Recovery in British Columbia*. It offered a plan for a recovery-oriented system of care, but the NDP government rejected this work led by Dr. Evan Wood, even scrubbing the report from the centre's website.

Tragically, over 8,900 people have died of drug toxicity since then.

To the Premier, why did the NDP government reject the 2018 plan and deny thousands of people struggling from addiction with the critical help that they need?

Hon. J. Whiteside: I thank the member for her question on a topic that I know is of great concern to everyone in this House, to all British Columbians and to everyone in our communities. Indeed, our government, since 2017, through our ten-year roadmap, articulated in the Pathway to Hope, has been building out an integrated system of care for people who are struggling with substance use.

That has involved ramping up of treatment beds. We have built over 360 treatment beds. We now, in the province, have over 3,200 treatment beds for people struggling with substance use. In every respect, across the entire continuum of care, we are building out community counselling services.

We are investing in child and youth mental health. We are investing in treatment and recovery. We know how important it is, and we are going to stand with British Columbians on their individual paths to recovery.

Mr. Speaker: Member, for a supplemental.

E. Sturko: I thank the minister for the response. It is unfortunate that over 11,000 people have died and that the rollout of beds really equates to the nearly six years that this government has been operating.... That it's really only added three treatment beds a month in British Columbia.

Alberta successfully implemented a recovery-oriented system of care and drastically reduced the number of deaths based on the same report that this NDP government rejected.

[2:05 p.m.]

The Premier could look to Alberta to see what B.C. could have achieved if this government had acted on the 2018 report. But when I attended the recovery conference in Calgary last week, with experts and ministers from across the country, nobody from this government was there.

Again to the Premier, why has this NDP government failed to prioritize critical treatment and recovery services for nearly six years?

Hon. J. Whiteside: I think there is no question that British Columbians understand that when we talk about the dramatic toll the toxic drug poisoning crisis in this province has taken, the work we are doing with respect to harm reduction is absolutely critical in addressing that. We know we have to keep people alive in order to connect them to treatment. I have heard that time and time again from people with lived experiences. We have heard that from the families who have had loved ones who have died.

With respect to our achievements, I do want to talk about the work that we did, from 2017 to 2019, ramping up harm reduction interventions, ramping up treatment supports, ramping up an anti-stigma campaign that all contributed to dramatically reduce the mortality rate — dramatically. In 2019, we saw a dramatic reduction...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. J. Whiteside: ...in the number of people who died due to toxic drug poisoning, demonstrating that the work that we had laid out in our plan was working. That is the work that we are going to continue to do.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. J. Whiteside: We are going to continue to work hard with front-line providers, with our partners in health authorities, with physicians, with community partners to regain the ground that we lost due to the COVID pandemic.

I will say that when it comes to where good ideas come from, there are good ideas coming from all over the place. I was very pleased that staff from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh.

Please continue.

Hon. J. Whiteside: I was very pleased that staff from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions were able to take part in the conference that occurred in Alberta so that we can take those learnings as well.

ADDICTION TREATMENT AND RECOVERY
SERVICES AND MEDIA COVERAGE
BY BROADBENT INSTITUTE

S. Bond: What the minister failed to recognize is that every single day in British Columbia, we hear from families who have loved ones who want and need access to treatment. Here's the reality. They simply cannot get it. That's the reality.

I'm relieved to hear the minister say that they're willing to look at good ideas, because that is exactly what we and the Leader of the Opposition are suggesting. We need to see a dramatic shift in this province that will prioritize treatment and recovery. What did this minister say when we outlined a plan that would do just that? It's nothing but a distraction.

Even more concerning is that the NDP's ally PressProgress — which is financed, as I know the Premier knows, by the Broadbent Institute — is spreading harmful and offensive claims that addictions treatment is “not really medicine.” PressProgress and the Broadbent Institute are even attacking recovery experts and pushing theories that “addiction treatment represents a tip of the spear on privatized medicine.” That is harmful, it is offensive, and it needs to stop.

Will the Premier do the right thing today and publicly denounce these harmful and offensive attacks on addictions treatment?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. J. Whiteside: I thank the member for her question. I do want to also thank the member for her work on the select standing committee. I think that was an important example of what British Columbians expect from all of us in this space, given the unprecedented nature of the public health emergency that is the toxic drug poisoning crisis in our province.

What I would say is that we are taking our advice from experts, as we have always done. The work that our government did in the '90s on this file, the work that we have done from 2017 is informed by experts.

[2:10 p.m.]

It's informed by the remarkable people who work in our health authorities, the addiction medicine specialists, the folks in public health who are supporting the harm reduction strategies to try to keep people alive, to try to keep people alive who are struggling with a condition that is a chronic and relapsing condition, as we all know — a chronic and relapsing condition that may require many, many tries at treatment before they are successful.

We have to be there for people all the way through the continuum, all the way through their path. Our path is absolutely supported by a \$55 million investment in

integrated child and youth teams, which are going to help pull together mental health supports, health authority supports, mental health and addiction supports to support kids in schools. That is the work that we are absolutely laser-focused on, hon. Speaker.

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

S. Bond: While I appreciate the minister's comments about the work of the Health Committee, what we would have preferred to see instead of a motion, which is going to potentially take up time in the Legislature, is an action plan that takes up the recommendations that were made by all parties in this Legislature.

I can tell that the minister was uncomfortable talking about the Broadbent Institute.

Well, the Premier can't claim ignorance when it comes to that organization. He only needs to consult with his top political adviser, Matt Smith. Smith's immediate past job, before joining the Premier's office last fall, was, to quote his résumé, to provide "fundraising advice for the Broadbent Institute." The government's news release announcing Smith's appointment even quoted the Broadbent Institute as endorsing him.

It is so upsetting to see someone who is basically running the Premier's office doing nothing about the attacks on treatment and recovery providers.

Today the Premier has the opportunity to do the right thing. First of all, adopt the Better Is Possible plan and take a stand against the attacks that are being made on treatment and recovery providers.

Hon. J. Whiteside: I have to say... We do have a plan, and we've been executing that plan. We've been taking action on that plan since 2017. We have been making substantial investments of hundreds of millions of dollars in treatment.

We all agree, in this House, on the importance of connecting people to the services that they need.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. J. Whiteside: That is why we have opened, last year alone, 105 treatment beds, which have already helped 624 people. We have new out-patient withdrawal management services....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, hold it.

When the question was being asked by the member for Prince George–Valemount, the other side was very cour-

teous. They listened to the question. Now let's provide the same courtesy to hear the answer, please.

The minister will continue.

Hon. J. Whiteside: Thank you, hon. Speaker.

We have new out-patient withdrawal management services across the Interior Health Authority and new treatment and stabilization beds in places like Kamloops, Kelowna and Lillooet. We have new sobering beds in Port Hardy. We are making strides every day to ramp up services, including upstream for children and youth, for adults accessing counselling programs. We know we have to act across the entire continuum.

There is no dispute, on this side of the House, about the importance of treatment and recovery on that spectrum. It is not helpful to try and create divisions where, in fact, there are none. We have a plan, which we will continue to work with. We are very, very grateful to work with all parties to make progress on this very pressing issue for British Columbians.

OLD-GROWTH FOREST AND BIODIVERSITY PROTECTION AND SPECIES-AT-RISK LEGISLATION

S. Furstenau: Thousands of people gathered here at the Legislature on Saturday, including Neil Young, to show their support for old-growth protection in B.C. While this government has made some important changes, old-growth trees continue to fall, and the situation is dire.

[2:15 p.m.]

The spotted owl population, a species dependent on old-growth forest, is down to just one bird left in the wild — one bird. Logging continues in spotted owl habitat, and 448 cutblocks were recently approved or await approval by this government in spotted owl habitat.

This government approves logging while breeding spotted owls in captivity to prevent them from going extinct. It's not unlike shooting wolves to save caribou while continuing to destroy caribou habitat.

The federal Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Steven Guilbeault, is now recommending an emergency order to protect spotted owls because B.C. is not stepping up. If approved, this will be the third time in Canadian history where an emergency order has been issued to protect an endangered species.

This isn't the first time the federal government has had to step up to correct this government's failures. They stepped in to protect caribou, to protect wild salmon and to monitor Teck's environmental disasters along the Elk River.

Mr. Speaker: Question, Member.

S. Furstenau: Hon. Speaker, my question is to the Pre-

mier. When will he commit to implementing biodiversity legislation?

Hon. B. Ralston: Protecting and promoting the recovery of threatened species in British Columbia is a top priority for this government. We're doing everything we can to help spotted owls recover, including running the world's only captive breeding and release program for this endangered species.

We've protected more than 281,000 hectares of spotted owl habitat, an area equivalent to 700 Stanley Parks. This is enough to support a future population of 125 breeding pairs. In addition, we have put in place additional deferrals in two Fraser Canyon watersheds, the Utzlius and Spuzum watersheds, to help protect spotted owl habitat and ensure no logging takes place in these old-growth forests.

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

S. Furstenau: Wow. We are down to one bird in the wild, and this government thinks that that's something to celebrate as a success story. That is astonishing.

It wasn't the question I asked. I asked the question to the Premier — whether there would be biodiversity legislation or species-at-risk protection legislation.

In fact, work on that legislation started in 2017. It was promised by this party, in the 2017 election, that they would introduce species-at-risk legislation, and the work started. The people that were working on that legislation were told to stop working. I'm very curious to know who told those people to stop working on the legislation, which was promised by this government to the people of British Columbia.

My question again is to the Premier. Will he commit to introducing biodiversity legislation? It's not like we're debating any other legislation in this House right now.

Hon. G. Heyman: Thank you to the member for the question. As I'm pretty sure the member knows, when we began working on, at that time, species-at-risk legislation for B.C., the first thing we did was begin a series of consultations with First Nations, who very quickly made it clear to us that they needed to be involved in the development and discussion of the legislation at every stage of the way.

My colleague the Minister of Forests has talked about the work that we've done, in partnership with the federal government and First Nations, with respect to deferring logging in the old-growth habitat while we await the results of a captive breeding program and ensure that we can protect spotted owls.

Of course, there are many species. That is why we entered into, at the same time we made the agreement with the federal government, the negotiation of a nature agreement, a comprehensive nature agreement, with the federal

government by which we could take steps to deal with ecosystem integrity.

[2:20 p.m.]

Again, we are working with that, as we should, with First Nations around the province to ensure that it is government to government to government and that we get it right.

Our government has committed to implementing all of the recommendations of the old-growth strategic review. That includes enacting biodiversity legislation. That is being done and worked on by my colleague the Minister of Water, Land and Resource Stewardship in conjunction with First Nations, as we must and as we should.

STATUS OF ROYAL B.C. MUSEUM AND COLLECTIONS FACILITY PROJECT

T. Stone: The Cowichan Hospital replacement project is already well over three years behind schedule, and it's a shocking \$850 million over budget.

Mr. Speaker, if you thought that this boondoggle was bad enough, last week we heard the NDP express only a half-truth with respect to the current proposed cost on the Royal B.C. Museum's warehousing facility in Colwood. Instead of that facility being \$46 million over the initial budget estimate, which the NDP would have British Columbians believe, the actual budget is now nearly double that. Costs have ballooned to a staggering \$93 million over budget, and it's two years behind schedule. They haven't even broken ground and started construction on this project yet.

Headlines are already proclaiming the return of NDP fudge-it budgets, and we haven't even made it to the budget tomorrow.

My question is this. If the NDP are applying this level of spin to the museum boondoggle, how can British Columbians have any trust in tomorrow's budget numbers?

Hon. L. Popham: Thank you for the question. I can tell the member that I was very happy about the announcement last week. It means we're ready to move forward, break ground this summer and get a very important building up and going to house our over seven million artifacts and shared history of British Columbia.

In July 2020, the original budget came out. I will admit that there was an increase. That was also revealed in an announcement that came out. I don't expect the member to follow along on budget announcements. I can say that 2½ years ago we were asked to go back and find energy efficiencies, to use the lens of CleanBC to come back with a very sustainable plan. We did that.

The announcement last week was a reflection of the cost of doing business these days, which I am sure the members understand. We have now landed on a fixed-price contract with two excellent companies, one a Canadian firm that is known for its sustainability design and an architect firm

from Vancouver that is also well known for its sustainability.

From this project, we will not only protect our shared interest in seven million artifacts. We're also going to find that about 1,000 direct and indirect jobs will come of this, and we have room for 25 years of growth.

On this side of the House, we believe that protecting our shared history is important. I would hope that the other side would as well.

Mr. Speaker: Opposition House Leader, supplemental.

T. Stone: Well, Mr. Speaker, only the NDP would call a \$100 million cost escalation on a project a sustainable plan, a sustainable plan for a project that nobody asked for and that nobody wants. And \$100 million more than the original budget.

The collections building was supposed to cost \$177 million, and it was supposed to be completed by next year, 2024. As I said a moment ago, it's already nearly \$100 million, or 52 percent, over budget, and construction hasn't started. Meanwhile, downtown, here in Victoria, the museum has been half gutted for 15 months since the government abruptly closed down Old Town and the entire third floor. British Columbians deserve better than a half-empty museum in Victoria and an empty field in Colwood.

My question to the Premier is this. When will the Premier admit that the collections facility is a complete and utter boondoggle? When will he scrap this project and instead do a modest upgrade of the museum across the street, including the reopening of Old Town and the entire third floor?

[2:25 p.m.]

Hon. L. Popham: Well, I do have a different opinion than the member. I think people do want us to be able to house our seven million artifacts of shared history and protect that.

I think British Columbians understand that for the past many years, there's been great concern about the archives and the fact that a lot of our really important documents are stored under sea level. That is not ideal, and we risk losing these important documents of our history.

I'm not sure the member also understands the scope of what we're talking about. This building out on the West Shore will be an amazing place, not just for storing our seven million artifacts. But there are opportunities for education, K through 12. There are post-secondary educational activities. There will also be incredible research opportunities. This will be something that we will see international visitors come for.

These seven million artifacts are very diverse. They go from an 11,000-artifact collection from Emily Carr, but we also have an incredible amount of other types of artifacts. The member might not know this, but we do have

an artifact called Buster. This is a Ferrisaurus, otherwise known as the iron lizard of the Sustut River. It is the first unique species of dinosaur found and identified in British Columbia.

Those are things we need to protect, and we need to be able to show British Columbians what they have.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh. Shhh.
Members. Members. Members.

SEVERANCE PAY TO
FORMER DEPUTY MINISTER AND
APPOINTMENT TO B.C. HYDRO BOARD

T. Halford: When the Premier made changes to his office, Lori Wanamaker, the Deputy Minister to the Premier, was paid a \$600,000 severance. On the same day, she was appointed to B.C. Hydro. That now pays \$93,000. This isn't severance. It's double-dipping.

Will the Premier personally take responsibility for his decision to hand out an obscene severance to have that person employed in the government on the same day?

Hon. D. Eby: It's an honour. I just crossed the 100-day threshold as Premier of this province.

Interjection.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Columbia River-Revelstoke, please.

The Premier will continue.

Hon. D. Eby: I just crossed the 100-day threshold as Premier of this province, and it's been a great honour every single day. I see it as a privilege and opportunity to deliver for British Columbians on health care, on housing, on public safety and a clean economy that works for everybody.

Making sure that we have a strong team at B.C. Hydro. It's hard to think of a more important time for B.C. Hydro, frankly, when we're facing a climate crisis, a need to electrify our economy; when we're looking at the economic advantages that B.C. has around the ability to deliver firm power and reduce emissions by electrifying people's homes; switching from fuels that contribute to climate change, but also industry; and driving industry by delivering affordable, reliable power.

Having Lori as chair of the board is going to be critically important. She served under both sides of this House. She started in the Office of the Auditor General. She was deputy at the Ministry of Finance for many years. She is an accountant. She is an exceptional leader, and I am so glad she's agreed to take on this job.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Surrey White Rock, supplemental.

T. Halford: For the Premier to get up and speak about his 100 days.... It's been 100 days of hot air for British Columbians.

Now, to the Premier....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh. Shhh. Members.

T. Halford: A bit sensitive.

To the Premier, there is a difference between severance and double-dipping. Lori Wanamaker collected the massive severance but continued in a job paid for by taxpayers. The Premier handed out \$600,000 of severance with one hand, while giving a job with the other, all on the same day.

How does the Premier justify this outrageous so-called severance for someone who did not even leave the government?

[2:30 p.m.]

Hon. D. Eby: I thank the member for the opportunity to run through a few of our accomplishments as a government in the first 100 days.

I'm sure the member was watching as....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members, please.
Members. You asked the question. That's enough.
Member for Abbotsford West, please.
The Premier will continue.

Hon. D. Eby: I'm sure the member was watching as we announced \$400 million for the first phase of a ten-year cancer plan, faster treatment for British Columbians across the province, including regional cancer centres in Nanaimo and Kamloops.

I'm sure the member was watching — well, in fact, he was here — when we passed legislation setting targets for local government, when we announced a half-billion-dollar plan to protect tenants in low-cost rental housing.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Shhh.

Hon. D. Eby: I'm sure the member is well aware, on public safety, when we established peer response teams to take the pressure off police to respond to people in mental health crisis; teams of prosecutors, police and probation officers around repeat violent offenders; and when the federal government agreed with us that they needed to change the rules around bail to protect communities.

I'm sure he was watching when we had \$180 million for a manufacturing fund for a clean economy and when we added 100 jobs back to the mill in Crofton that was closed.

Just this weekend — the second affordability credit for B.C. residents for up to \$410 per family, and \$500 million to stabilize B.C. Ferries fares in the face of rising costs.

I know the member knows we have legal obligations around severance that we have to meet when people leave government. I know he knows that B.C. Hydro is independent of government, and it's good that it works that way. But we have those obligations.

I'm so glad that Lori agreed to take on this vital job as chair of B.C. Hydro, because to deliver on things like this, to continue to deliver, we need leaders like her chairing that board, not political appointments like they did every single time they had the chance.

SEVERANCE PAY TO FORMER CHIEFS OF STAFF AT PREMIER'S OFFICE

P. Milobar: Let's be clear. The cancer announcement was actually part of the 2020 election promise by the former Premier and was actually supposed to be fully implemented by now. So in the NDP land, I guess taking three years to start a ten-year plan is considered a success, as people are waiting for cancer treatment, of all things.

Our Cowichan hospital that has been delayed, and now is over twice as expensive as when it was first announced, is considered a success by this government. Our collections building that's \$100 million over budget and delayed is considered a success, and now we have the Premier trying to deflect away questions about severance. It seems that money is never an object when it comes to this Premier's office.

We have the \$600,000 of severance, which also triggered a new government job on the very same day. We have the former chief of staff, Geoff Meggs, walking away with \$340,000, and then we have Amber Hockin, an NDP insider who accepted the job as this Premier's deputy chief of staff but resigned very shortly afterwards and explained a payout of \$190,000.

Now, she resigned, and in her resignation letter, she stated that she wanted to "move onto another chapter in my life, one that is filled with grandkids and hobbies." No one can fault someone for that, but it's a resignation after only a few weeks on the job.

Can the Premier please explain why that still triggered a \$190,000 severance payment?

Hon. D. Eby: The member knows we have legal obligations in relation to personnel. We meet those legal obligations, and all policies are followed.

[End of question period.]

Question of Privilege (Reservation of Right)

S. Bond: I rise on a point of personal privilege, based on remarks made by the Minister of Forests.

[2:35 p.m.]

Orders of the Day

Hon. R. Kahlon: I call committee on Bill 8, intituled the Real Estate Services Amendment Act.

Committee of the Whole House

BILL 8 — REAL ESTATE SERVICES AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

The House in Committee of the Whole on Bill 8;
J. Tegart in the chair.

The committee met at 2:39 p.m.

On clause 1.

The Chair: I'll call the committee to order. We're dealing with Bill 8, Real Estate Services Amendment Act, 2023.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I just want to recognize the staff, the folks that are here, supporting me today, covering for the Minister of Finance for this.

[2:40 p.m.]

We have Renée Mounteney, who is the ADM of policy and legislative division. We've got Tiffany Norman, who is the executive director of financial and corporate sector policy branch. We have Derek Moryson, who is the policy and legislative analyst.

I look forward to the exchange.

P. Milobar: Thank you to the House Leader for taking over for the Finance Minister today. Although this, on the surface, seems like a housekeeping bill, it started to concern us in opposition when what we thought would be fairly straightforward questions in committee stage turned into quite long, repetitive speeches by government — especially members of cabinet that repeated similar themes almost word for word — which would lead me to believe that there was some sort of background briefing or overview of what this bill should be spoken to, from a government point of view.

One of the main pieces kept getting repeated was that this bill will change the language back to how it was pre-2016. Now, we've gone through and through. We can find, in the Real Estate Services Act, which this bill is amending, an amendment made with some repealing that was done in 2016. However, those were for sections 131

to 137, which, by our reading, have absolutely nothing to do with the foundation, given that the foundations are sections 90 to 98.

Can the minister provide us with a cabinet document, an order-in-council, a piece of legislation or something that changed in 2016, that all of these statements were being made and connected to?

Hon. R. Kahlon: Thanks to the member for the question. I think he knows that I can't give him any cabinet documents.

I can share with him that in 2016 there were some changes that happened around the Real Estate Council. In fact, when those changes happened, there were more government appointees that were put in place at that time. Because there were so many government appointees put in that place at the time, that brought it into the GRE.

These changes now, with the changes that we've made here, with this piece of legislation, would pull it back outside of the GRE. I hope that answers the question that the member had.

P. Milobar: No, it doesn't. My understanding is that we're dealing with the Real Estate Foundation, which is very specific in its language. There's other language around the Real Estate Council. I understand that in 2016, the Real Estate Council had changes made to it.

I can't see where any of the sections in the bill, the Real Estate Services Act, have changed from sections 90 to 98, which are the ones that are specific to the Real Estate Foundation. Those would have been the ones, I thought, that would have changed in 2016.

Again, I'm not asking for confidential cabinet documents, but if it was an order-in-council, surely that must be public. If it was a piece of legislation that had amendments in it, surely that must be public.

We simply cannot find either that would relate to anything to do with sections 90 to 98. Given that this bill deals with sections 91 and 93 and that all the discussion is around changing the language back to pre-2016, one would think that the section 91 language must have been changed in 2016.

[2:45 p.m.]

Hon. R. Kahlon: When the changes happened to the Real Estate Council in 2016, those changes impacted the foundation, because the council was able to appoint an additional member. So it impacted the foundation.

Staff have shared this with me, and I'll just share it, read into the record:

"Prior to 2016, three foundation board members were appointed by the government, and four members were non-government appointments. Of non-government appointments, one appointment was made by the Real Estate Council of B.C., a self-regulatory organization. In 2016, the former government replaced the entire council with government appointees, making the council a government entity. Because of this change, the council's foundation ap-

pointment became an indirect government appointment, and the foundation became part of the GRE.”

P. Milobar: I’m sorry. The changes in section 91(1) in this bill are only changing (e); they’re not changing everything.

I read 91, the most current copy of it, which was amended in 2021, when the previous Finance Minister was actually in government and more government members were added to the committee. These are her words from second reading — the former Finance Minister, who actually amended this legislation in 2021: “How can we get the most out of this incredibly important organization that has been shackled by a piece of legislation that was written in 2016?”

When you read the versions of the Real Estate Services Act, the previous versions, and then the current version.... First off, I’ll read the most current version. This 91: “(1) The board of governors of the foundation consists of the following individuals: (a) one member appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council; (b) one member appointed by the British Columbia Real Estate Association; (c) one member appointed by the Real Estate Institute of British Columbia; (d) one member, not licensed under this Act, appointed by the minister; (d.1) one or 2 members, appointed in accordance with the regulations, if any.”

[2:50 p.m.]

That was actually added in 2021 under this government. Then, “(e) the minister or another member appointed by the minister,” and (e) is what’s being removed here today. None of the others are being removed or reworded. Again, where is the written change? What was brought forward to this chamber in 2016 to change any of 91?

Hon. R. Kahlon: To the member’s question, in 2021, when the Real Estate Council was dissolved, that impacted 91(a), because that appointment was no longer there because we had dissolved the council, but that was the only change at that point.

P. Milobar: Well, thank you. I’m just going to spell it out for the minister, I guess. The confusion comes in that with the filibuster by the government on a housekeeping bill, the frustration is that this is where people are supposed to be able to understand in the public what actual actions this bill will meaningfully take or not.

The problem we’re having right now as opposition is we tried to facilitate getting to this stage quickly, and the government chose to put up speaker after speaker and minister after minister, one of which was the former Finance Minister, who kept talking about how this will get the foundation unshackled from government, because it’ll be back to pre-2016 wording.

[2:55 p.m.]

There are only two clauses that this bill is amending, and I don’t see anywhere where clause 91 is back to pre-2016

wording. Can the minister confirm that the government MLAs and ministers that repeatedly talked about going back to pre-2016 wording was not an accurate statement on their part as it relates to clause 91?

Hon. R. Kahlon: I’m glad we’re able to have this exchange, because it’s good to be able to get into this legislation and talk about the importance of it.

I’ll read into the record what I’ve already shared with the member, which is that prior to 2016, three foundation board members were appointed by government, four members were non-government appointments, and one appointment was made by the Real Estate Council of B.C., a self-regulatory organization.

In 2016, the former government replaced the entire council with government appointees, making the council a government entity. Because of this change, the council’s foundation appointment became an indirect government appointment. The council was now an agent of the Crown, and the foundation became part of the GRE. That’s why this is an important piece of legislation.

P. Milobar: Well, I have one copy of the bill. Again, one would think that a complete replacement of clause 91 and the membership would be considered a consequential amendment to this bill.

If you go to the back of the version that I have, it’s not listed, no consequential amendments. This version that I have is an older copy than the other one staff provided me. It’s: “The board of governors of the foundation consists of the following 5 individuals: (a) 1 member appointed by the real estate council; (b) 1 member appointed by the British Columbia Real Estate Association; (c) 1 member appointed by the Real Estate Institute of British Columbia; (d) 1 member not licensed under this Act, appointed by the minister; (e) the minister or another member appointed by the minister.”

That was the first version I was working off of, trying to figure out the impact of this change to the legislation. It seemed to match up because there was (e) and (e).

Then staff found me the newer version that’s based on the 2021 changes, which again has the repeal in 2016 as a consequential amendment for sections 131 to 137. No mention of anything being done to section 91 in 2016 whatsoever in the consequential amendments. Again, one would think a complete restructure of a board....

The reason I raise this is that the composition of the board has always had, by our reading, a member appointed by the British Columbia Real Estate Association, and that’s not by the minister, and a member appointed by the Real Estate Institute of British Columbia, and that’s not by the minister. The whole board has not always been appointed by government, by our reading.

It gets back to the statements made by government members in this House around putting this language back to pre-2016. Since the minister can’t provide the date that

that would have happened, I fail to see how something as simple as moving (e) out requires a legislative change, but the full restructure of this board between the years, apparently, of 2016 and 2021, when the former Finance minister suddenly added more members to the board, all of those require legislative change. But somehow between 2016 and 2015, the whole board was completely reworked.

Now this amendment that only deals with (e) is taking us back to pre-2016 language. Again to the minister: can he explain or can he at least acknowledge — we'll be generous with the characterization — that government members all misspoke when they were speaking on second reading about this bill taking the language back to pre-2016?

[3:00 p.m.]

Hon. R. Kahlon: I appreciate the member taking the time to listen to my colleagues talk about the importance of this bill. They would be correct in saying that this takes it back to function where it was prior to 2016. On the changes, I've laid out how that would be the case, several times. I can, if the member wants me to, repeat it again.

P. Milobar: Well, the member for Surrey-Panorama: "This bill will now read the way it did before 2016" — back in 2016. Making it a government reporting entity. And: "...the previous government's tenure was switched over in terms of the composition, back in 2016." That was the Minister of Water — and the former Finance Minister, and member after member.

They obviously had very similar, if not word-for-word, speaking points around 2016. The point being, and the reason I'm taking time on this, is the government chose to fill the air time with a lack of legislation for us to work on, repeating things that actually weren't really accurate. It's troubling, especially when it's Ministers of the Crown, because that's what the public's perception of this is.

A lot of the narrative in second reading was around a grand unshackling of the Real Estate Foundation, because they'd been shackled. Apparently, removing (e) out of the board will unshackle this foundation. I want to be clear: on our side, we agree that the Real Estate Foundation does great work. They do great philanthropic work. We don't take issue with any of the members on the board whatsoever. We recognize their skill sets. They're on the board legitimately and should be there, and the members of their subcommittee should be there.

The questions I'm asking have absolutely nothing to do with them on a personal level, but the statements made by government members are a little shocking, in terms of how the government controls the existing system, has too tight of a grip and has shackled the foundation from doing the great work they do.

Can the minister confirm that with the change in clause 1, none of the internal operational structure of the foundation will change in terms of how they select their own lead-

ership on their board, how they deal with their subcommittee work or with any of those structures? So the board will still be able to select their own chair? The board will be able to select their own subcommittee chairs and things of that nature?

Hon. R. Kahlon: Again, I will re-emphasize to the member that when my colleagues say that this legislation will take the function back to pre-2016, they would be correct. What I also will say to the member is: yes, the foundation can choose their own chair.

[3:05 p.m.]

What he probably heard from several of my colleagues — I can repeat it again — is that the foundation came forward with many challenges with being in the GRE. They had some challenges around funding and programming issues. They had stakeholder engagement challenges. They had obstacles with Indigenous relations and engagement with Indigenous communities.

So this change helps them be able to be even greater and serve the province in a better way, which I think the member and I can agree on.

P. Milobar: Again, we will probably each start off our questions and answers the same way. I'm reading from *Hansard*, so the minister can say that I'm interpreting what his colleagues said, but I'm not. I'm reading from *Hansard*. The member for Surrey-Panorama said: "This bill will now read the way it did before 2016" — "read the way," not be interpreted, not function like. Many other members said similar.

But 91 is the focus of clause 1, and 91 is removing (e) and substituting the minister or another member appointed by the minister to now be: "one member appointed by the British Columbia Non-Profit Housing Association."

Under the current legislation and board makeup, there's one member appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor-in-Council, essentially the minister. There's one member not licensed under this act appointed by the minister. There are one or two members appointed in accordance with the regulations. Those are both by the minister. Then there's the minister or another member appointed by the minister. That's the one that's being replaced and changed out through the Non-Profit Housing Association.

I'm just at a loss, given that the minister currently could appoint one, two, three, four, five members of a seven-member board, how the minister now appointing four members of a seven-member board completely unshackles this board.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I'll repeat this again, but I'll say it maybe in a different way, which is that prior to the changes we're making in this legislation, four out of the seven members were government appointed. The change we're making here makes it three out of seven, which allows it to come out of the GRE.

[3:10 p.m.]

For example, “one member appointed by Lieutenant Governor in Council,” that’s (a); “one member, not licensed under this Act, appointed by the minister,” that’s (d). Then under (d.1), it says “one or 2 members appointed in accordance with the regulations, if any.” One is appointed by UBCM, and one is done by the minister. So three appointments of the seven are within government, and four are outside.

P. Milobar: Now, again, there was a lot of talk about the great unshackling that this change will create and the ease of getting grants, which would happen.

I can understand that perhaps maybe some outside foundations or that might be concerned with it being a government reporting entity. I can understand that.

Can the minister please maybe illuminate us on what government members, in their speeches, would be referring to when they say “get government grants from government”? Has the government been refusing to provide grants to the Real Estate Foundation because they’re a government reporting entity?

Hon. R. Kahlon: I think my colleagues were probably referring to the fact that now, by being outside of the GRE, it provides two important pieces. It allows the foundation now to have more flexibility, so money can be spent not in one fiscal year, but it can be spent over multiple years.

I know the member will know about that. He’s been the critic for Finance for a while. Also, a lot more flexibility in administering grants to other organizations.

P. Milobar: Maybe I shortened the quote up a little too much for the minister, to be fair. So I’ll read the full sentence of the quote to maybe provide the full context, because I was sitting in here when it was said: “I want to speak about how having the Real Estate Foundation of British Columbia unshackled and able to work in partnership and get grants from government...” Now, those were the Minister of Advanced Education’s words, who was previously the Finance Minister who actually amended this legislation in 2021, who actually oversaw the Real Estate Foundation up until she was no longer the Finance Minister.

One would assume that as chair of Treasury Board, Finance Minister and overseer of the foundation, she would know whether or not it was becoming a problem getting government grants.

Again, was the government withholding grants to the Real Estate Foundation because they were a government reporting entity? And if so, which grants?

Hon. R. Kahlon: Certainly, I’m glad my colleagues found this change to be important, because it is important for this foundation and the work they do.

I’ve already highlighted for the member some flexi-

ilities that come with not being in the GRE. Surely, he can appreciate the ability to take dollars year over year. Surely, he would appreciate the ability to be more flexible about how grants are administered. There are important pieces for the foundation there that will help them better serve the public.

That’s what my colleagues are very happy about. Certainly, I’m happy about that as well.

P. Milobar: Can the minister confirm...? Again, there was a lot of discussion about the great work the foundation does, and this side doesn’t take issue with that. It was around the whole watershed program.

[3:15 p.m.]

Could the minister confirm two things: that the watershed program was a large grant from this government and that it is money that will spend several years for the foundation to distribute?

Hon. R. Kahlon: The grants the member is referring to would come from Water, Land and Resource Stewardship. It might be a question you can canvass in estimates.

P. Milobar: The only reason I ask that question is the minister tried to make it sound like the only possible explanation. When the former Minister of Finance says that it would enable the foundation to get grants from government, she must have been referring to multi-year grants, because, of course, that makes it easier to get a year-over-year grant. Yet the same grant the members from government filibustering this bill were referencing is a pretty significant grant that’s doing great work out there. But it’s not all spent in one year. It’s going to last a few years.

I’ll move on, in the interests of time. The minister said that there will be no change to the internal board structure in terms of how they select their leadership. So again, I’m just curious. There was a lot of commentary around the unshackling and government oversight. There’s the government reporting side of the comments. But there was also government oversight and control comments of the unshackling from various government members that happened in their filibuster speeches as well.

I’m wondering. I’m not sure.... I recognize this is the minister substituting for the minister. Currently the chair was voted to be the chair by the board, and that’s a government appointee person. All of the vice-chairs of the various committees are voted for by the committee, and they are people that were appointed by the government.

In fact, on the Indigenous Advisory Committee, because we heard a lot about how this will free up work with Indigenous communities, is actually the president of the NDP. I’m just wondering if any of this legislation is actually going to significantly change the government oversight or overview, given that the government seems to have a pretty strong hold, and the board seems comfortable with that in

terms of the people that are in different roles. They selected them. They agreed with them.

Again, I go back to my earlier comments. We're not taking issue with any, and that's why I'm not naming names. We don't take issue with any of them on a personal level or a skill set level. But it seemed interesting that the government members were talking about this oppressive government oversight yet, at the same time, having a board structure and a subcommittee structure that is very heavily weighted with government oversight and connections.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I've said this multiple times. I'll say it again. Currently four of the seven members are from government. Three are not. With this change, three become from government and four become independent.

[3:20 p.m.]

The core of the member's question, I think, is: with these changes, might the current structure change? Of course. Of course it could change. There's going to be an additional person outside of government coming in, and they can decide whether they want to change committees or if they want to change the chair of the committee.

P. Milobar: Again, these are all in the context of 91(e), which is putting a member of the Non-Profit Housing Association on the foundation, which we don't object to.

I'm quoting now the member for Stikine. "That structure has its pros and cons, I suppose. One of the pros is that it gave government a great deal of influence as to who sits on the board, which allows the government to appoint a number of directors, have much more involvement on the day-to-day workings of the foundation." They'll still have that because none of the actual operational side is changing, according to the minister.

Then, later on, this same minister, in his second reading — not this minister but the minister I'm quoting — says: "There's one small change that allows us to make sure that there is a strengthening, particularly of First Nations' participation, in how the foundation operates. That's addressed in Bill 8."

Can the minister or his staff point me to either the amendment in clause 1 or clause 2 that specifically increases, by way of legislation, the involvement of First Nations in the foundation?

Hon. R. Kahlon: I'm sure my colleagues were referring to the fact that the B.C. Non-Profit Housing Association, which now has a seat, has stated very clearly that they are committed to reconciliation. They support the foundation's interest to have a board that reflects more diverse perspectives with respect to real estate.

P. Milobar: I do applaud the minister for doing his level best to try to defend the overstatements by his colleagues repeatedly on a filibuster on a bill. I guess my hope out of

all of this.... I'm not trying to filibuster a bill that actually is fairly straightforward to read.

My point over this last 45 minutes or so, given that we only have motions to debate this afternoon, or discuss, and not legislation, was that there's a danger when government starts to filibuster what are housekeeping bills — and what the opposition has acknowledged are housekeeping bills and is supportive of — because this is the stage that the time would be better spent actually asking those questions and digging in to find out the ins and outs, the intricacies of how it will actually impact the real world.

The repeated statements, though, frankly, that I was hearing as I listened to the debate were getting more and more frustrating because it was painting a very inaccurate picture of what this bill actually does.

[3:25 p.m.]

This bill, as we all know, has only two clauses being amended, removing some language and switching out one person. Yes, it results in it not being a government reporting entity, but it's fundamentally not going to create the atmosphere that we are being led to believe with the comments, let alone the utopia that some in government were painting that the foundation's work was going to do.

They do great work. But in the expectation, if you listen to what some of the speeches were, they're the next to cure the most incurable disease known to man, based on the work of the foundation, because of all the great works they do. It was getting to that level of discussion.

Frankly, it was a bit of an affront to how this place is actually supposed to work. People expect a lot more accuracy in statements coming from government members, let alone ministers of the Crown, let alone ministers that previously used to have this file and actually amended this bill in 2021.

With that, Madam Chair, I'm probably out of questions. It is straightforward. I'll have no questions on the other clause or on the commencement date.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I'm sorry the member is frustrated. I think he knows, all members of this place know, that we're all elected here, sent by the people of our communities, to speak to bills. Everyone has the right to speak to a bill. Certainly, that's what my colleagues were doing. I think it's important work.

Again, I appreciate us being able to go through, in more detail, some of the pieces the member wanted to canvass, and I thank him for a good exchange.

Clauses 1 to 3 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 3:27 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

**Report and
Third Reading of Bills**

BILL 8 — REAL ESTATE SERVICES
AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

Bill 8, Real Estate Services Amendment Act, 2023, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I call now committee on Bill 7, the Land Owner Transparency Act.

Committee of the Whole House

BILL 7 — LAND OWNER TRANSPARENCY
AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

The House in Committee of the Whole on Bill 7;
J. Tegart in the chair.

The committee met at 3:29 p.m.

On clause 1.

The Chair: I call the committee to order. We're dealing with Bill 7, the Land Owner Transparency Amendment Act, 2023.

Member for Kamloops.... North Thompson.

P. Milobar: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I know our ridings are light-years apart, in the geographic sense.

[3:30 p.m.]

In keeping with the spirit of the minister's opening comments on this bill, which were that it's a bill to address minor legislative, interpretive and technical issues, I only have, actually, one or two quick questions, and possibly only the one.

My understanding is that this is an update to errors that were found with the first Land Owner Transparency Act, to correct. That's understandable, a new piece of legislation that might have the odd error in it.

Was there any push from any law enforcement agencies or any of that type of enforcement side of the equation, either federal or provincial or municipal, that asked the government to make these changes, because they were finding that they were unable to proceed with any money-laundering types of investigations or prosecutions — eventual prosecutions, hopefully — because of the language that now needs to be changed not existing?

Hon. R. Kahlon: Again, I'll start by saying this legis-

lation, the Land Owner Transparency Act, was historic when it was introduced, the first of its kind in Canada. I know that certainly, on our side, we're very committed to addressing money laundering.

When we brought the act in there were significant changes. We are now seeing in practice that act working. What we have identified are changes that will help the act better perform as was intended when it was brought in so that we can be more efficient in the work we do and get the outcomes that we want.

P. Milobar: I have no other questions on the bill.

Clauses 1 to 16 inclusive approved.

Title approved.

The Chair: We will take a short, less than five-minute, recess.

The committee recessed from 3:34 p.m. to 3:38 p.m.

[J. Tegart in the chair.]

The Chair: We'll call the committee back to order.

Hon. R. Kahlon: I move that the committee rise and report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved.

The committee rose at 3:39 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

**Report and
Third Reading of Bills**

BILL 7 — LAND OWNER TRANSPARENCY
AMENDMENT ACT, 2023

Mr. Speaker: Members, the question is third reading of Bill 7, Land Owner Transparency Amendment Act, 2023.

Bill 7, Land Owner Transparency Amendment Act, 2023, reported complete without amendment, read a third time and passed.

[3:40 p.m.]

Hon. R. Kahlon: I call continued debate on Motion 18.

[J. Tegart in the chair.]

Government Motions on Notice

MOTION 18 — APPOINTMENT OF SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO REVIEW PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS (*continued*)

K. Greene: It's my pleasure today to speak to Motion 18 here on the territories of the Ləkʷəŋjínəŋ-speaking people, the Songhees and Esquimalt nations, on whose territory I'm very grateful to be at and whose connection to the land continues today.

Motion 18, to appoint a special committee to examine the use of private members' time, is something that I'm very strongly in favour of. This committee is going to make recommendations for improvements to things like private members' bills and private members' motions. It will conduct a review of both of the elements of this time that we have and report back to the House.

I think it's very important that that report comes back as soon as possible. That is reflected in the language of this motion. The Special Committee will report back to the House no later than October 5, 2023. This signals how important this work is. It tells us that the work that happens as private members is important and is part of functioning democracy. A lot of business happens here at the Legislature. We find that we're often short on time. Efficiency and reviewing that efficiency of private members' time is something that is definitely needed.

The motion to review the private members' time really cuts down to the question of: what is the highest and best use of this time? Because our time is limited, we want to make sure that we are doing the best that we can for the people of British Columbia while we're here. What does highest and best use mean? It means that we have a scarce resource, and that is time. There are lots of philosophers who have spoken at length on how important time is. There are also some things in economics that speak to this. Being a former student of economics, the quote "maximize your utility" is something that comes to mind. That means getting the most out of the resource that you have.

Motion 18 recognizes the scarcity of our time. The committee is going to find ways to optimize the use of that time. It's been a long time since we've had a meaningful review of private members' time here in the Legislature. For those who are watching, perhaps you're not aware. Every Monday morning we have two hours set aside for private members' time, which is the business of private members — those who aren't in government cabinet.

Currently, the first hour is for private members' statements. Members can choose a topic of importance to them. Maybe it's local. Maybe it's a personal passion. But it's something that's important for us to hear about here in the Legislature. Then in the second hour of private members' time, we have a private members' motion. It is de-

bated. It can get a little testy, as I'm sure folks here in the chamber can attest to. But it clarifies the values that are held by members here and the priorities that are held by parties. It doesn't enact changes in legislation. But it is an important way to describe to people what it is that we are prioritizing and working towards in government.

This motion for a special committee is important. There are diverse communities that are represented here in this chamber. We have people of diverse ethnic, gender, religion and all kinds of different backgrounds. Everything that you can describe, we have it represented here.

[3:45 p.m.]

We also have diverse backgrounds. What have people done before they ended up here? We've got nurses. We've got tech entrepreneurs. We have farmers. We have lawyers. That's just on our side of the House. I know the other side is represented in all different areas as well. Hearing from all those diverse voices in private members' time is really important. This committee is going to ensure that we are optimizing this really important resource we have, time, but also the diversity of voices we have here, so we can better represent the communities that we come from.

I'm very sure that the other side has thoughts and opinions on what private members' time should look like, as well as the Third Party. I'd love to hear their input. I think that hearing from all of these different perspectives and then knitting them together is something that is going to be part of the fundamental work of this committee.

The special committee is going to review the private members' time, and it's really good that it is, because the Legislature does some of its very best work in committee. I know that there have been a number of instances where we've had heated debates on things like privacy or health and were able to discuss those in committee in a way that is not as combative as it is often here in these chambers.

People ask me sometimes about question period and whether that's reflective of the work that we do here as elected members of communities, and I have to say that when we are in committee, we do some of our best work. We have conversations that are open, and we are listening, and we are collaborating to get to a destination that works well for the people of British Columbia.

In those committees, we get to talk about what's important. We get to talk about our priorities. Then all these diverse voices that are here in this chamber, our backgrounds, whether it's your personal background.... As a woman, I have a different background than, perhaps, the other members that are from Port Coquitlam. It's interesting that we can also have different backgrounds on our work experience. Then all of those things can come together, and in the committee, they can mesh, and then we can get a better result as a result.

I just want to say that I am very grateful that I am elected to these chambers, and that's because of the support of the residents of Richmond-Steveston. The people of Steveston have very, very diverse backgrounds. They come from all

corners of the world. I am so proud of the way that my community comes together. I know that everybody here is impressed by their community and proud of the work that the people do.

I think that when we have this committee, when we are looking at private members' time and making it better, we're respecting that commitment to the people in our different regions, respecting the diversity of the people across this province. I know very much that our ridings are full of very different people with different priorities, but often those priorities are the same. We are different, but we are more the same than we are different.

By reviewing and making recommendations about private members' time, the special committee is going to be ensuring that all of these voices are being heard. All of these different communities are going to be better reflected in the work that we do here.

The special committee in this Motion 18 is going to be empowered to hear from the public, from our communities, from academic institutions, people who have studied this for many years, stakeholders. They're going to have options to provide input to the special committee.

In the committees, like other committee work that I've undertaken — I know other members have as well — we get to have dialogue with people that are presenting. We get to ask questions and hear from people that are truly experts and people who are just very interested in making democracy better.

By reviewing private members' time, the work of the special committee is really an opportunity to improve democracy. We can look at other jurisdictions. We can see what's working there and, importantly, what is not working. I, unfortunately, know that there are a number of democracies that are faltering, and perhaps, understanding better the pitfalls is a really good way of making sure that we don't repeat any of those.

[3:50 p.m.]

I think we're very, very fortunate to have this opportunity to make our democracy work better. It's not every day that an opportunity like this is available. We need to protect our democracy and strive for improvement. Being open to suggestions and hearing from people on how to make it better is very fundamental to improving democracy. Our government is always looking for ways to make things better and that are going to help people be better heard.

As the elected member for Richmond-Steveston, which is on the traditional territory of the Musqueam Nation, it's important to me.... I'm here. I'm honoured to be able to support this motion, which creates an opportunity to increase the functionality of representative democracy.

Through the work of the special committee, we're going to get a report, as I mentioned before. It will be reported to the House no later than October 5, 2023. That report, as most committees do, is going to be supported by all

parties. So it does have those diverse perspectives embedded in it, as well as of the public and experts.

The special committee is another example of how our government is doing business better on behalf of the people of British Columbia. It's noteworthy that the special committee will include all parties — like when our government provided legislative drafting services to opposition members of the Legislative Assembly. Our government is always looking for ways to do this important work better.

Motion 18 is going to create a special committee. That's wonderful. This report is going to point to ways that we can improve our democracy here in British Columbia and avoid pitfalls that other areas may have taken. Those pitfalls might not be apparent to us, but they are going to be revealed by the committee's work. That's why that's important.

Ensuring independence and improving government process are what we do — like fixing the Electoral Boundaries Commission so that they can work, unfettered, to ensure that every vote in B.C. is equal. This special committee will be no different. It's another opportunity to do things better and to serve British Columbians better.

It's probably no surprise that I'm enthusiastic about democracy since I've been elected here. I thank the people of Steveston very much for their trust and support. I've worked for them each and every day since I've been elected. I never take for granted the importance of the work that we do here and the responsibility that we have on behalf of our constituents and all British Columbians.

Motion 18 is to strike a special committee to review private members' time on Monday morning. Two hours doesn't seem like a lot of time in a week, but when your weeks are as filled as everyone's are here, two hours can be very significant.

I think ensuring we're doing the best we can in every single part of the day is really important. It's a responsibility that we have to the people of British Columbia — to ensure that we're reviewing and implementing change, not just on private members' time but throughout government. Where we can make processes better, make them serve people better, it's incumbent on us to do that.

In conclusion, I am pleased to support this motion to launch a special committee to review private members' business. It has been too long since private members' business has been reviewed, and I'm very much looking forward to hearing the conclusions in the report and to hearing about the work that the committee is undertaking. I'll be following it very closely, whether I'm on it or not, because I'm keenly interested in the different aspects of the democratic process here in British Columbia and in Canada. We all are so fortunate to have a front-row seat to that.

I will take my place, Madam Speaker. Thank you very much.

F. Donnelly: I'd like to start off by thanking the mem-

ber for Richmond-Steveston for her very thoughtful remarks.

[3:55 p.m.]

I'm happy to rise in support of the motion: "That a Special Committee to Review Private Members' Business be appointed and empowered to examine the current use of time for Private Members' business by the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia and other parliamentary jurisdictions in Canada, and to make recommendations on possible improvements to the consideration of Private Members' business, specifically, Private Members' bills and Private Members' motions, in the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, and that the Committee report to the House by October 5, 2023."

I would also like to acknowledge the Ləkʷəŋjɪŋəŋ-speaking people, specifically the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations, whose territories we are on and able to conduct our business.

It's been far too long since the House has meaningfully reviewed the time spent here on Monday mornings, known as private members' time. Private members' time is an opportunity for private members from both sides of the House to raise important issues on behalf of their constituents and to speak to important challenges facing British Columbians.

The purpose of this special committee will be to examine how private members' time can best serve the needs of people in British Columbia. Obviously, there are diverse views across the province, and we believe it's important to hear from both sides of the House as we hear from community leaders across the province.

That's why a committee made up of all parties in the Legislature is being struck and will include ways for the public and stakeholders to make submissions. I certainly appreciate the opportunity to consider this and to give input. I also look forward to hearing ideas from others, including across the aisle.

The committee can also look at practices in other jurisdictions — what works and what doesn't work. I think it's really important to take a look at how decisions are made in this Legislature. I think we also need to consider how decisions are made in other Legislatures, whether it be in other provinces, our House of Commons, the Upper House in Ottawa, in other countries like the United States, the U.K., Australia, New Zealand, in Europe or Scandinavia or any other democratic institution.

We can learn from those institutions how they make decisions on laws that govern them, how they set policies that govern their land and resource use, how they resolve differences and disputes. It's instructive to examine how other places make decisions in order for us to learn, improve and evolve our thinking in decision-making.

I spent ten years in Ottawa, in the House of Commons, three terms and three very different governments.

I was first elected in 2009, in a by-election, to a Conser-

vative minority. Stephen Harper was the Prime Minister at the time.

In 2011, I was re-elected, and it was an exciting time for me. I remember our leader, Jack Layton, took our party, the NDP, to new heights. Indeed, we became Canada's official opposition for the first time in our party's history. Very exciting.

I will say, on the other hand, that Stephen Harper got his majority. The Conservatives ruled with a majority government, and they certainly changed many laws during their time as a majority government.

Finally, I was re-elected in 2015, which saw the Liberal Party rise to become, also, a majority government.

Three very different terms. Three very different governments.

I would like to highlight how laws and the legislative decision-making process were important in the making of laws in those Legislatures in those terms.

In terms of laws being changed, one law I remember being changed under the Harper majority government was the Fisheries Act. The Conservatives were very exacting in their change. They removed what's called a HADD, a harmful alteration, disruption or destruction of fish habitat, from the law.

[4:00 p.m.]

This had the effect of taking it from being one of the strongest pieces of legislation in the country to an extremely weakened state of protection for fish habitat. They dismantled that protection to facilitate their oil agenda, and they were not shy about that. They told Canadians that's exactly what they were doing. They could do that because they had a majority government.

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

I'll also say that Canadians didn't like that. So in 2015, they gave Stephen Harper and the Conservatives a resounding defeat. The Liberals under Justin Trudeau came to power, and they formed a majority government.

You can see that the three terms of parliament that I've served under were very, very different. First, a Conservative minority, then a Conservative majority and, finally, a Liberal majority. In each session of parliament, the committee makeup was very different, even though the structure was very much the same. Their committee system in Ottawa is quite different from the committee system here in the Legislature.

I'd like to highlight how the committee system works in Ottawa as an opportunity to learn and take elements of what works there and consider applying it here for some of those members selected to the committee. In Ottawa, each official party is represented at the committee table, and each party has a set amount of time to ask questions during a committee meeting — usually a committee meeting is about two hours — with witnesses, which all parties agree to. Again, that's critically important.

First of all, the Chair and vice-Chair and the members are all agreed to. Their speaking times are all agreed to; the amount of time allotted to each party and each side, all agreed to; the witnesses, all agreed to by all the committee members. There's a lot of discussion, a lot of back-and-forth and then eventually agreement.

Each party has a set amount of time to ask a limited number of questions to key witnesses. Whether it's government officials or subject-matter experts or Indigenous knowledge-keepers or industry or labour reps, they all have an opportunity to provide the committee with input, providing testimony. Questions by committee members are asked and answered by witnesses. Witnesses give their answers, and debate occurs among committee members.

Certainly, depending on the personalities around the committee table, there is agreement. Sometimes it's a highly partisan discussion. Often it is not partisan, and there are good comments back and forth. There is an opportunity to listen, to learn, on both sides, on all sides, and it's critically important. It's not always unanimous, but it's usually unanimous.

That's an important element, I think, of the work that we do here. As the member for Richmond-Steveston mentioned, especially in things that are on television or quite popularized in the media.... Question period is very dramatic. It's very confrontational. It's very positional. It's an opportunity for the opposition to try and embarrass the government or make the government look like it doesn't know what it's doing. For government, it's an opportunity to try and get its message out and let the people know what its agenda is and its objectives are.

[4:05 p.m.]

But in committees, there's often very.... There's not as much attention paid to what's happening at committee. That's an opportunity for both sides, I think, to bring to the forefront, to highlight, how to make our communities better and how to make the best legislation or laws that we can. That is, I think, critically important.

Now, the key outcome of committee work is usually the report. There are all of these witnesses that come that provide key testimony and key information. I know of many witnesses who have put a lot of time and energy and effort and finances into the preparation of their testimony. It's critically important, and they feel it's important. Certainly I, as a former committee member at the federal level, felt it was very important to hear and to understand their perspective.

That report needs to reflect that input, that testimony and, more specifically, the recommendations. I think that's where it's key. At the committee stage, it really is about the recommendations. What is the committee itself recommending to the government that the government do differently in terms of affecting its either policy or legislation?

At committee stage, recommendations are discussed, debated and voted on. Each member and all parties have an opportunity to participate and alter the course of

legislation and/or policy. Occasionally, the governing party members agree to the amendments, and then the amended recommendations are adopted along with the report. This often has the outcome of changing, sometimes slightly, sometimes significantly, the legislation or policy being debated.

It's not a perfect system, but it certainly gives the government a chance to hear from experts, including different perspectives, along with the opposition's point of view. It also gives the opposition an opportunity to contribute to recommendations and the outcome of the legislation or the policy being addressed. Again, it's not a perfect system, but it's a good and fair and thorough system. It's one that I think we can....

I would recommend and encourage the committee that's struck here to take a look at that system. There are many other systems like that. Can we look at our neighbouring province? Can we look at other provinces or territories in the country to see how their systems operate so that we can improve our Monday morning sessions — our private members' time?

I think that will be a challenge for the committee that's struck to do that in a relatively short amount of time, but this is an opportunity to take the time to review what other legislatures use, and their way of getting to good decision-making and getting to good results, because after all, that's what people want to see. They want to see our province improve. They want to see the work that their representatives do reflected in those recommendations in the reports that we bring forward that actually change the laws of how people in this province are governed.

I want to finish, Speaker, on mentioning that once the report is approved and reported on to parliament, it's then up to the government to implement the recommendations in the report. The government could decide not to or they could decide that they're going to immediately implement those recommendations. It's up to the government to do that, and if you're a majority government and if you don't like the recommendations, you may decide you're not going to implement those. If you're a minority government, it's a little riskier to do that. You may risk not being able to hold the confidence of that parliament.

[4:10 p.m.]

I think it's important, the role that opposition plays in the input that's provided. Certainly, that private members play — it's critically important. I believe that a government that doesn't listen to the opposition carefully can run the risk of becoming out of touch. That happens on either side, in any party, in any level, whether it's local, provincial, federal. It's critical, I think, to be in touch with the people that represent that body. It's a good idea for all governments, I think, to be wary of that.

It's up to us parliamentarians to design the best system we can and that represents the people that we each represent in our respective ridings.

I work hard to represent the good people of Coquitlam—

Burke Mountain, whether it's fighting for more schools in our growing community, more child care spaces, more affordable housing, more park space. These are all things in my community that constituents and people tell me are critically important. They remind me every opportunity they get that I should be representing those views.

I bring those views to this chamber. I bring those views to committee work. I bring those views to private members' time. I know each of us around this chamber does the same. I value that input. I value the perspective that we can get of this entire province in this chamber.

Again, the opportunity for us to come together through this committee to develop and hopefully evolve a better two-hour session on Monday mornings is a critical task and an important one. That's why I support this motion. I wish those who are tasked with designing our private members' time on Monday mornings all the best with their deliberations and their recommendations.

With that, I will take my seat.

Hon. B. Bailey: I request we take a five-minute recess.

Deputy Speaker: There's been a request for a five-minute recess. We will take a five-minute recess.

The House recessed from 4:12 p.m. to 4:15 p.m.

[S. Chandra Herbert in the chair.]

Deputy Speaker: All right, Members, I'd like to call this House back into session. Of course, I would recognize the Government House Leader.

Oh, sorry. We still have to wrap the debate on.... I guess the debate didn't finish on that.

Seeing no further speakers, all those in favour of the motion.

Motion approved.

Deputy Speaker: Now we'll go back to the Government House Leader.

Apologies.

Hon. R. Kahlon: Mr. Speaker, I call Motion 17 on the order paper.

MOTION 17 — ADDICTIONS CARE

Hon. R. Kahlon: I move Motion 17 standing in my name on the order paper:

[That, consistent with the Report of the Select Standing Committee on Health intitled *Closing Gaps, Reducing Barriers*, this House affirm its support for a spectrum of addictions care, such as life-saving harm reduction measures — including safe consumption sites, decriminalization and safer supply — and for a rapid, unprecedented expansion of drug treatment and recovery spaces.]

Hon. J. Whiteside: It's a real honour to rise in support of this motion and to talk about what is clearly a critical issue for all British Columbians and, indeed, for all members of this House.

I do first want to express, on behalf of our government and, I think, indeed, all who sit in this House, our deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones, families, members, friends to the toxic drug poisoning crisis and want them to know that we stand with them in their grief. To those British Columbians who are struggling with mental health and substance use issues: I want you to know that we see you, and we are working hard to ensure that you have the care and support that you need.

We lost 2,272 people to suspected toxic drug poisoning in 2022. Each death is a tragedy, and each loss is unimaginable. The poisoned drug crisis is a scourge, and it is happening across Canada and, indeed, across North America. It has been made much worse by the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is, in fact, the toll of the toxic drug crisis that compelled the declaration of a public health emergency by public health officials in 2016. It is what compelled our government, in response to that, to create the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions in 2017 so we could shine a light on this crisis, so that we could work across government to create cross-ministry programs and approaches and work to build a comprehensive system of treatment and care, including integrating mental health and substance use care into our primary care system.

I want to say that I do know how important this issue is to each member of this House. We all have our stories and our experiences. We all have people in our circles, in our communities, who may struggle with substance use and perhaps underlying health issues. We all feel compelled to advocate.

There has never been so much investment in resources and services as there is at this time, and there have never been so many people working to save lives every day as there are now. Yet, still, the toxicity of the illicit drug supply is challenging our efforts. While we have been adding services and supports at an unprecedented level, B.C. is, indeed, facing a rising tide of need.

We have accomplished much over the last five years. We have increased counselling services, increased services for children and youth, expanded treatment beds, expanded harm reduction services. We know that the expansion of overdose prevention sites has saved more than 7,000 lives, according to the B.C. Centre for Disease Control. We invest over \$2.8 billion in mental health and substance use care in B.C., and that amount has grown over the course of our mandate. Yet we know there is more to do.

[4:20 p.m.]

I am grateful for the consensus amongst all parties in this House, expressed in the 2022 final report of the Select Standing Committee on Health entitled *Closing Gaps, Reducing Barriers: Expanding the Response to the Toxic*

Drug and Overdose Crisis — that consensus that we need to work to build up a system of care and support across the continuum, from community-based supports to addressing stigma to harm reduction to treatment and recovery.

That report speaks eloquently to the agony, the frustration and the hope that British Columbians experience in a crisis that is complex and constantly changing. The report reflects the recognition of the particular challenges posed by the fact that addiction affects the heart and the head and is a chronic and relapsing condition that requires that we meet people where they are at. This process certainly struck a chord with British Columbians. The committee heard from 118 presenters and received 881 witness submissions. I think that we can all agree on this: we need to keep people alive so that they can connect to care and support.

I hold in my head and in my heart the words of harm reduction and recovery advocate Guy Felicella, who says so profoundly of his own lived experience: “I wouldn’t be alive today without harm reduction, and I would not have the life I have today without my recovery.” I think this sentiment echoes through so many of the conversations that I have with people in my community, with front-line care providers, with advocates, with experts.

Our ten-year plan sets the framework for this work. The Pathway to Hope is built on four pillars.

The first pillar is improved wellness for children, youth and adults. The actions that we have taken under that pillar relate to supporting pregnant individuals and parents with substance use challenges; promoting early childhood social and emotional development; enhanced programming in early childhood centres; expanding the Confident Parents, Thriving Kids program; and expanding Foundry centres. I’m going to talk a little bit more about our specific work in that area in a little bit.

It has also meant expanding mental health in schools through establishing our integrated child and youth teams; scaling up step-up, step-down; specialized care home beds; intensive day programs for children and youth; as well as creating virtual counselling for post-secondary students.

The second pillar of Pathway to Hope supports Indigenous-led solutions. The actions in that regard relate to implementing the tripartite MOU with the First Nations Health Council, the First Nations Health Authority and the government of Canada and developing a ten-year strategy to achieve progress on the social determinants of health and wellness, so many of which are at the root of the challenges people and communities experience with respect to mental health and substance use and which we must address in a whole-of-government way.

It includes embedding cultural safety and humility across the provincial system and recognizing that Indigenous people and First Nations people, in particular, are disproportionately impacted by the toxic drug crisis.

We are expanding First Nations–run treatment centres and land-based cultural and healing services as well as

supporting the capacity for First Nations, Indigenous and Métis Nation B.C. to help them in their important role in this work and supporting First Nations–led primary health care initiatives, an excellent example of which I had an opportunity to visit in the Downtown Eastside, the Kílala Lelum primary health care centre for Indigenous people in that community.

The third pillar is around better care, saving lives; around addressing substance use, again through that continuum of care. It speaks to developing a framework for improving the substance use system of care in B.C., ensuring that we are using the best evidence as we build out that system; increasing access to evidence-based addiction care; integrating team-based service delivery to connect people to treatment and to ongoing recovery.

[4:25 p.m.]

Overdose emergency response — scaling that up, including community-based harm reduction services; supporting recovery services; and very importantly, listening to people with lived experience and embodying that notion of “nothing about us without us” in the work that we do. In that respect, we support and take advice from and are very grateful for the work of the Provincial Peer Network.

The fourth pillar is around improved access and better quality. That is the work we’ve been doing around expanding access to affordable community counselling, to team-based primary care with mental health and substance use professionals; increasing specialized services; enhancing our provincial crisis line network; the framework and standards to improve care under the Mental Health Act; implementing peer support coordinators, and I will talk about peer workers, particularly in respect to Foundry, in a minute; developing peer support worker training resources, which has been a fundamental part of the Foundry work; expanding the Bounce Back program; the *Mental Health and Wellness Disaster Recovery Guide*; addressing workplace mental health; and creating those digital resources that are so important in terms of providing access for people across the province.

We are making historic investments in all of these areas, including mental health and addictions support, including enhancements across the full spectrum of treatment and recovery. We know that our early work in this area yielded important results.

In 2018-2019, we ramped up access to community counselling. We opened more treatment spaces. We expanded harm reduction services. We ran a major anti-stigma campaign. We did, indeed, shine a light on this issue, and we saw the result of that in reduced mortality. In 2017 there were 1,495 British Columbians lost to toxic drug poisoning. That number increased in 2018 to 1,562, and in 2019, as a result of all of this work, it reduced for the first time in years to 987. That is, of course, still 987 souls too many. But it does show what we can do when we shine a light and harness all of our resources in this area.

When the COVID pandemic hit, our front-line health care workers were dealing with two unprecedented public health emergencies, both very different in scope and nature. We lost ground because of the pandemic, and we are working hard on all fronts with our community partners, with health authorities, with front-line providers, with communities of lived experience to make up that ground. It is because of those strong relationships, because of that collaboration, that B.C. is actually leading the way on many fronts.

One of the important developments has been the development of an approach to safer supply which is, again, about keeping people alive so we can connect them to care and treatment. B.C. is the first province to offer prescribed safer supply. This is innovative, and in the context of the pandemic, it was a very necessary measure.

People have been accessing prescribed safer supply since March 2020, when the province introduced the first phase of the program. Nearly 1,200 people have accessed a safer supply since we launched the prescribed safer supply program in 2020.

The second phase of prescribed safer supply is being implemented in health authorities and through federally funded SAFER program settings. Our government is investing over \$22 million over the next three years to support health authorities in their important work to support the expansion of prescribed safer supply. This funding will support the expansion of existing and the creation of new programs and increase staffing capacity. It will address robust monitoring and evaluation of the program's implementation.

We now have, across the province, over 700 prescribers, including over 100 nurses who have completed the training to prescribe, a first in Canada. We have another 100 nurses enrolled in that training now. I thank them for stepping up to do this important work.

[4:30 p.m.]

Decriminalization has been.... Really, we've answered a call that has come from so many partners to apply to the federal government for an exemption, and we received that exemption to remove criminal penalties for people who possess small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use.

The objective, the whole goal of this is around the decriminalization of people who use drugs. The objective is to reduce the fear and the shame that keep people silent and that lead so many to hide their drug use and avoid treatment and support.

As we so eloquently heard from Kathryn Botchford, whose husband died as a result of toxic drug poisoning, this is a critical step. It answers a long-standing call from police, public health, front-line providers, advocates, people with lived experience and municipalities to treat addiction as a health matter, not a criminal matter. We know that reducing the stigma of drug use is a vital part of B.C.'s work to build a comprehensive system of mental health and substance use care.

Decriminalization, of course, as we know, became effective January 31. We're continuing our work with a broad cross-section of partners to make sure that police are trained and that front-line health providers are prepared for this change. Again, I'm very grateful for the agreement of all parties in this House, through their work on the select standing committee, with respect to the importance of this step for British Columbians.

We know as well that overdose prevention sites play a critical role in saving lives as we respond to the increasing toxicity of the drug crisis. We have heard from the coroner of the importance of those services. We've also heard about the importance of drug-checking services.

British Columbia has begun to use very innovative, cutting-edge technology to expand and enhance drug checking as well as developing a free app called the Lifeguard App that helps save lives by automatically connecting those people who use drugs to first responders if the user becomes unresponsive. From May 2020 until the end of December 2022, the app had been used more than 114,305 times by 16,100 app users. That is, again, another important way of supporting individuals as they deal with their own substance use journey.

I think what we all understand from the evidence that drives our interventions — the evidence from addictions, medicine, physicians, public health and health authorities — is that substance use disorder is a chronic and relapsing condition. We have to provide services and entry points all along the path. We have to work to build a system where the door that an individual walks through is going to be the right door and connect them to the services that they need.

When it comes to treatment, our government is committed to supporting British Columbians through their treatment and recovery journey. As B.C.'s Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, my focus continues to be keeping people safe and secure while investing in the services that they count on. We are building a full system of care with diverse options so that people can get the treatment that they need.

For a long time, we've been patching holes where urgently needed. We know that we can't continue with the sort of fragmented collection of services that was in place before we created the Pathway to Hope. But through the work we've been doing over the last number of years and through our historic investments, we're beginning to make true system-level change. Our historic investments support a range of services, from withdrawal management to transition and assessment to treatment and aftercare services, including a \$132 million investment specifically for treatment and recovery in 2021.

[4:35 p.m.]

Since 2017, we've opened more than 360 new adult and substance use treatment beds. We now have over 3,260 publicly funded substance use beds in B.C. We opened 105 last year alone. We know that those beds have helped

624 people on their journey. As an example of our commitment to work with our health authorities in delivering these, providing this access to care, in 2017 the Interior Health Authority didn't operate any youth treatment beds, and now, today, they operate 25 beds.

We know that the new outpatient withdrawal management beds in Interior Health, the new treatment and stabilization beds in places like Kelowna and Kamloops and Lillooet, and the new sobering beds in Port Hardy will all have a big impact on providing access to care for people.

We've also opened the 105 beds at the Red Fish Healing Centre. That, of course, as everyone knows, is a leading-edge centre for mental health and addiction treatment and research that treats people from across the province who live with the most severe, complex substance use and mental health issues. We know that recovery and treatment services like Red Fish are a key part of the continuum of mental health and substance use care in B.C., as well as a vital part of addressing B.C.'s toxic drug crisis.

It is certainly about, as I've said, investing all across the continuum. We've also invested in non-bed-based treatment. There are more options now for medical-assisted treatment available than ever before, including injectable opioid agonist treatment and low-barrier pharmaceutical alternatives such as a tablet iOAT and programs in most health authorities across B.C.

In November 2022, over 24,000 people were dispensed opioid agonist treatment medications, and we've seen a dramatic increase in the number of clinicians prescribing OAT treatment over the course of the last five years. Access, as well, to that particular treatment has been significantly expanded through rapid access to addictions care clinics in all health regions so that more people can access the care they need when they need it.

To increase the number of clinicians who can prescribe medication for opioid use disorder, particularly in rural and remote parts of the province, registered nurses and registered psychiatric nurses can now complete training to begin prescribing OAT. We're the first province to expand that scope of practice for RNs this week, and just last week we brought into force changes to the Mental Health Act so that nurse practitioners can now assess patients for involuntary admission under the Mental Health Act.

We're also improving the system of care by investing in ensuring that our health authorities have the services and the people on hand to connect those individuals who reach out to health care services, treatment and recovery.

People living with severe mental health challenges also now have access to 29 assertive community treatment teams throughout B.C. that provide 24-7 supports. These teams are located in every health authority in B.C., and their services include crisis assessment and intervention, psychiatric or psychological treatment, medication management and more.

When we talk about the impacts of mental health and substance use, we have to be investing upstream. We have

to be investing in children, child and youth mental health. In 2017, we invested nearly \$240 million in new and expanded mental health and substance use for care and young adults. More than 28,000 children and youth receive community-based mental health services each year.

We heard from the testimony to the standing committee how important it is to address child and youth mental health. We're making it easier for children and youth to connect with the supports and care by creating integrated child and youth teams. It's a \$55 million investment to bring together, again, sort of cross-ministry, cross-agency teams that are now operating in five school districts, with another seven districts recently announced.

We know, of course, there is much more to do to respond to the need for supports in communities across B.C., but the well-being of children and youth is a priority for our government, and we will continue to do what it takes to expand services across B.C., including \$53 million in early psychosis intervention supports, which will bring 100 new full-time care providers into the system.

We've expanded counselling for kids. We've invested \$6.5 million to expand services for youth and adults living with eating disorders, again trying to get to those upstream issues. Here2Talk is a free counselling service for post-secondary students that's been accessed more than 24,000 times.

[4:40 p.m.]

I want to talk for a minute about the Foundry program. We continue to open Foundry locations across the province, which are not really only about mental health for kids. I've had a chance to visit the Foundry in Richmond and the Foundry in North Van. At their best, the Foundry system is really about primary care for children and youth.

It is remarkable to see a central intake, a seamless kind of approach, for kids who may be coming in for counselling services. They may be coming in for harm reduction supplies. They may be coming in for sexual health advice. They may need to see a primary care doctor. At their best, that is excellent primary health care for kids. One door and everything that they need. We're going to do everything that we can to improve those and expand those services.

I just wanted to say.... Jessica Harrington, who is the integrated child and youth clinical counsellor on the Maple Ridge team, talked about the importance of having one central intake, one door that a youth goes through. She talked about how, in her former role in a different system, one 12-year-old who she was dealing with had repeated his story four times before he finally got to the provider that he needed. So an integrated approach really is what we need.

Again, I'm very grateful to the folks who have done the really heavy lifting of trying to reorient and kind of break the pathway on this innovative model.

One of the key elements to this model is involving peer workers. I can't say enough about the youth I've had the

opportunity to meet who are doing this work, supporting peers. These are peers with lived experience. They may have had lived experience of substance use or any kind of mental health anxiety. They are working to support other youth in a similar situation.

I think that peer approach is really important. I'm very proud of the work that we've done to develop an actual curriculum around training peer workers. I'm also very hopeful that that becomes a ladder opportunity for those individuals who do that work to eventually work in our health care system.

Really, the objective here has got to be all about integrating this work into our primary health care system. We're taking huge steps forward in that regard with our plan around building out our primary care approach to this. We have added hundreds of FTEs to our primary care networks and to our urgent and primary care centres to provide more integrated, more seamless access to mental health and substance use care for British Columbians.

These FTEs are clinical counsellors. They're life skills workers. They're mental health and substance use clinicians, support workers, psychologists, social workers. There's no question we need more. This work is an important part of the HHR plan to ensure we are building a workforce that can deliver care across the entire continuum in a culturally safe, stigma-free and appropriate way.

In that regard, we also have a lot of work to do to support Indigenous-led solutions. We know that First Nations and Indigenous people are disproportionately impacted by this crisis. The result of colonialism, the impact of residential schools and the resulting intergenerational trauma have imposed a terrible toll on First Nations and Indigenous people.

Supporting Indigenous-led care and treatment pathways is fundamental to our vision as a government. It's why we're supporting the construction or renovation of eight First Nations treatment and healing centres. Those centres are supported by a \$20 million investment from the government of B.C., matched by \$20 million from the federal government, to support the First Nations Health Authority and to support the nations in getting those centres up and running.

We've also provided support to FNHA for the design and expansion of land-based and culturally safe treatment centres. Those centres, we know, are very important, in addition to the supports for Métis Nation B.C. for their work.

[4:45 p.m.]

There is so much more to do, as we face a rising tide of need. In the context of enormous investments and enormous work.... I have to say that I am so grateful to the front-line workers in the health authorities, the front-line providers in community, the advocates, the people with lived experience, who push us to do more and to do better every single day.

We are working, and need to do more work, to con-

nect workers with the supports they need. We know that 35 percent of the people who have died from toxic drug poisoning were employed. Most of those are employed in the trades and in transportation, and they are particularly at risk.

We need to continue to invest in the upstream supports. We need to put an equity lens on all of this work to address the disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations.

Housing is a big piece of this. This is why I am working with the Minister of Housing on developing complex care housing — so that we have the stability, the stabilizing process, for people who are at risk of becoming homeless to stay in their homes, with supports. It's why we're investing in community crisis programs like the PACT, the peer assisted care team, and the Car programs — to ensure that we are bringing those into our system as well.

There is no question that.... I think we all agree. I mean, this is not so much a partisan issue. This is a critical issue facing people in our communities. I am grateful for the opportunity to work together with all sides of the House and with all advocates on the front lines as we try to make progress for British Columbians.

E. Sturko: I would like to thank the minister for her remarks. She is correct. Our desire to save lives, make a difference in B.C. and bring our crisis to an end is a non-partisan issue. I want to make it clear, as well, that I support this motion.

That being said, it is my job, as a critic, as the shadow minister for addictions, mental health and recovery.... I do need to bring up some failures, some gaps in what has been provided in this province over the last nearly six years. The minister had mentioned that they are just beginning to build a system of care to address the issue.

Just last year there was a second B.C. Coroners Service death review panel. That report concluded: "With illicit drug-related deaths continuing to increase, it has become clear that the current response to this emergency is not working." So we know that even the coroner agrees that what has been happening here in B.C. under this government is not working.

I can tell you, as someone who was just recently elected to this place.... I just recently came from a role as a police officer. It was a job that brought me into contact with many people suffering from addictions. Unfortunately, it brought me into the homes of people who had succumbed from their addictions. It brought me into contact with people who had committed suicide as a result of their addictions.

I can tell you, over the last six years, here in Surrey policing, that these announcements are not translating into results. There have been many tragedies, I'm sorry to say, that, in my opinion, could have been prevented if action was taken sooner.

For years, our caucus has been advocating for urgent,

comprehensive action to help stem the deadly tide of the overdose crisis.

Today in question period, I brought up.... In 2018, this government had an opportunity to implement a strategy that was brought forward by the B.C. Centre on Substance Use in a report called *Strategies to Strengthen Recovery in British Columbia*, offering a plan for a recovery-oriented system of care. The government decided not to go for that. It scrubbed that from the centre's website. Since that report was scrubbed, 8,900 people lost their lives to drug toxicity.

I think it's a tragedy to know that we had not only this report, not only this plan, but two subsequent plans brought forward by B.C.'s chief coroner asking for things to be brought forward which could have been done by this government — a 30-, 60- and 90-day action plan for emergency action. This is a public health crisis.

[4:50 p.m.]

Even the B.C. chief coroner, Lisa Lapointe, believes that the current system is lacking at best. Recently speaking out on CKNW she said: "Treatment is not accessible in many parts of our province, and it can be very costly. There are a variety of treatment measures. Some are recovery services. Some are for profit. There's not a provincial regulation over that right now, so actually we don't have any way of knowing what's most effective where and for whom, and that's a recommendation that's been made several times."

We've had, for almost the entire tenure of this government, multiple plans and paths forward to save lives in B.C. that.... I'm not sure why.... It's extremely disheartening when I hear the minister and I hear other members of this House stand up and talk about how it's not partisan, that we need to work together, that ideas are welcome from everywhere, and then I know that there are plans that have been ignored.

I just received this. The member for Skeena brought me another report.

Deputy Speaker: Of course, we're not using props, Member.

E. Sturko: It's not a prop, Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: No. Please don't argue with the Speaker, Member. Just a reminder that we aren't to use items to try and demonstrate a point.

E. Sturko: Well, I received another report today, just now, from the member for Skeena. I apologize. I don't mean to use it as a prop, but I find it also upsetting. This is actually a report from First Nations leaders who got together. We talk about working together with Indigenous communities, and here we have a very comprehensive plan that was put together to build a treatment centre just outside of Terrace, B.C. It's a shovel-ready project. They wanted help with an addictions crisis centre because not only are there people in the Indigenous community there

that are suffering with addictions but many other British Columbians who are dying there from overdoses.

This B.C. government denied their request for funding and directed them to the native health authority. The native health authority has no funding, and their backlog is more than 20 years. So it is absolutely unacceptable that the government says that they want to work with First Nations in light of UNDRIP, and then they refuse to lift a finger to help on projects like this.

Since the crisis was first declared a public health emergency in 2016, more than 11,000 British Columbians have needlessly lost their lives. Yet despite the significant loss of life across every community in British Columbia, the government has been largely absent as the crisis continues to get worse. After five years of the creation of a specific ministry for mental health and addictions, people are no better off today than they were all those years ago. They face deadlier street drugs, months-long wait-lists for treatment, a lack of beds for withdrawal management and unaffordable privately run services.

The government likes to talk about harm reduction, particularly with publicly supplied addictive drugs. This government has had the opportunity to expand medically supplied drugs since 2019 to help with individuals who are suffering from addiction. Why has it taken so long to expand those programs? Why are we now making this the thrust of a major announcement when we've had the opportunity since 2019 to actually get that work done?

In the nearly six years that this government has been in power, they've only added an average of three treatment beds a month. It's not enough. The coroner's report last year.... It wasn't the first time that the NDP has ignored reports, as I said. It's very confusing and very confounding to know why they wouldn't have gone for strategies to strengthen recovery when now they're offering a very similar recovery-oriented system of care. What's clear is that this NDP government has had every option in front of them for solutions for years, but they've chosen to ignore them. Clearly, no one can look around and say that the current approach is working.

But better is possible. Just a few weeks ago, the Leader of the Official Opposition proposed a change in direction, a bold plan that would overhaul the delivery of mental health services and build a recovery-oriented system of care for people suffering from addiction.

[4:55 p.m.]

The key initiatives of the Better Is Possible plan are building on an innovative model like the Red Fish Healing Centre that was started by the B.C. Liberals and finished under the NDP, located on the former Riverview lands, in the regions across the province so that people with severe and complex needs can get compassionate care and 24-7 psychological support.

We will eliminate user fees at publicly funded treatment beds and provide direct government funding for private beds, because money shouldn't determine whether you get

well or not. We will build regional recovery communities where people struggling with addiction can stay for up to a year with individualized holistic treatment support. Although always a last resort, we will implement involuntary care for adults and youth at risk of harm to themselves or others. The status quo isn't working, and doing more of the same is not going to drive better results.

Instead of perpetuating an endless debate of harm reduction versus recovery, we need to provide real supports to people trying to overcome addiction and give them every opportunity to get better. Our approach is about using every possible tool in the toolbox, and that includes harm reduction and publicly supplied addictive drugs, but it can't be the entire approach. We've been clear that our toolbox must also include immediate, affordable, accessible treatment.

One of the biggest gaps in our system currently is the lack of data and transparency. We've learned from coroner's report after coroner's report how people in British Columbia have died during the toxicity crisis, why they're dying, who, what demographic. But how are they surviving? How are they living? It's critical that we act swiftly to establish detailed data systems to track provincewide performance measures and targets and clearly benchmark the number of publicly funded mental health and addiction treatment beds available to British Columbians. This will measure performance outcomes and ensure standardized care.

The status quo isn't working, and doing more of the same is not going to drive better results. It wasn't until our plan received widespread support, has the NDP come to acknowledge the importance of recovery and treatment. We need a coherent provincewide strategy throughout B.C. so that when someone reaches out for help, they can immediately get the services they need and can afford them. We'll continue to put forward our innovative solutions to everyday problems for British Columbians to fill gaps in leadership from the NDP, because better is possible.

The minister talked about decriminalization, and it has been made clear that all parties had supported decriminalization, but there were many caveats to that agreement with the federal government which, it's my belief, this government simply has not fulfilled to make sure that there is adequate mental health and addictions and medical services available for British Columbians when they need it.

Of course, it's important to reduce stigma and to make sure that people feel like they can reach out for help. That's what we want. That's our goal. But what's the point of having people reach out if there isn't help available when they need it or if they can't afford it. We have to make sure that we're creating a system where people can get the help they need when they need it and if they need it now, that they have something to go to.

I just find it incredulous. I have a hard time rationalizing where the sense of urgency has been over the last five

years when so many British Columbians have lost their lives and knowing that there's been so many pathways forward that this government could have adopted. That this government could have implemented. Recommendations by British Columbia's chief coroner. Recommendations by the B.C. Centre for Substance Use. First Nations. Yet this government has not taken the steps and has not followed recommendations of experts. This is a government that loves reports.

[5:00 p.m.]

This is a government that loves studies, yet when they get studies and information and reports, they don't follow them. Meanwhile, since 2018, 8,900 people have lost their lives. And now, when the B.C. Liberals come forward — when the opposition comes forward — and brings the idea that a recovery-oriented system of care is going to be the way forward for British Columbia, it's suddenly: "Oh, well, we've been working on that for five years."

Well, you know what? You've had this plan since 2018. It could have been implemented in 2018. It's ridiculous that it hasn't been. It's shameful that it hasn't been. It's our collective shame that so many British Columbians have lost their lives when we had a pathway forward.

There will be people who will listen to me today and say: "You know, she's very critical. Maybe she doesn't believe in solutions to the opioid crisis." That is false. I do. It's my job to hold you accountable, and it's my job to push you for better. If it takes putting the pressure on and making you recognize the failures of the last five years — and that's what it's going to take to finally get some action, some results from this government — then that's what I'm going to do.

I just can't stand by another year and see thousands of British Columbians dying of drug toxicity in a province where we have all the opportunity to provide treatment, recovery, harm reduction, education and enforcement — all the pillars.

The days of patchwork response have to be over. I hear this government talking about it. The reality is that a recovery-oriented system of care could have been implemented in 2018. It hasn't been. It's been a patchwork. Now the tides have turned, and thank goodness. I don't care where the idea came from, whether it was from the official opposition or whether someone finally decided to actually have a heart. It needs to get done. Enough is enough.

I will continue to work with the minister. I will continue to work with the government. I will continue to bring forward ideas. I'll gladly share the experiences I've had dealing with individuals with addictions and complex mental health issues, in policing and in my private life, if that's what it takes. I will encourage people from my constituency to bring ideas forward, because it isn't a partisan issue, and it's not a personal attack to want the government to be held to account.

It's about making sure that we end this crisis. This can't be more lip service. Whatever our Premier announces in

his budget tomorrow, it cannot be more announcements. It cannot just be more money into programs that don't lead to results. It has to be meaningful. Regardless of whether you're spending \$1 billion or whether you're spending \$1, it has to be focused on getting people results. That's what I'm going to continue to hold this government to, and that's what I'm going to continue fighting for.

Hon. B. Bailey: I rise today in support of the motion that, consistent with the report of the Select Standing Committee on Health, entitled *Closing Gaps, Reducing Barriers*, this House affirm its support for a spectrum of addictions care, such as life-saving harm reduction measures, including safe consumption sites, decriminalization and safer supply, and for a rapid, unprecedented expansion of drug treatment and recovery spaces.

[5:05 p.m.]

I'm a middle-class, able-bodied white woman who lives in Yaletown. You might look at me and say: "What does she know about addictions and the struggles that people facing these issues are dealing with?" I can read and learn and speak about what the research tells us, and I will, but I want take a few minutes to share my firsthand experience, because I know that despite how I present, sadly, for me and my family and my friends and for so many B.C. families like ours, we do have firsthand experience with the devastating impact of trauma, abuse, drug use, justice system involvement, homelessness and crippling addictions. It's not theoretical for me. It's personal.

There are a lot of terms thrown around when we talk about homelessness, addictions and mental health. Also, there are commas between these words — homelessness, comma, addictions, comma and mental health. People who are homeless may or may not be struggling with addictions or mental health issues. People who are struggling with addictions may or may not be suffering from mental health issues, and we must be careful not to conflate, because stereotypes do not serve us. Sometimes, not always, these issues do overlap. Sometimes, not always, they do not. Let's keep that in mind.

One term I hear very often referred to is trauma-informed service. What does that mean, and what's the relationship between addictions, mental health and trauma? Many people experience trauma. Trauma is part of life, unfortunately. Life is unequally traumatic. One family or individual may experience significantly more than another, and trauma can build on itself. That's the insidious nature of it.

Trauma can be things like loss. Grief is trauma. Violence causes trauma — for example, the trauma of war, which can lead to PTSD. Fortunately, humans have an extraordinary and beautiful capacity to heal. We can recover, and most often do, from trauma. One of the big differences between whether a person heals from trauma or whether that trauma dogs them for a long time, some-

times for life, is whether or not it's hidden. Shame and guilt come into play.

Trauma's insidious harm grows in the dark, but healing happens in the light. For far too long, our society has hidden trauma, hidden violent truths, pretended not to hear the screaming of an abused woman living next door, ignored bruises on a child, not spoken about the huge loss of miscarriage, pretended that those returning from war were okay, expected refugees to land on their feet after fleeing war-torn countries. All that pretending or ignoring has allowed the harm caused by trauma to fester and grow like black mould.

Many of the folks who live on our streets have experienced significant trauma in their lives, often trauma that has never been addressed. This is why trauma-informed responses are so deeply critical.

I want to get into this question of: how does a person live on the street? This is really important and personal to me, because I represent downtown Vancouver, and the majority of people in my riding are compassionate and caring folks. But every so often, I hear from someone who really sees a massive difference between them and the folks that are struggling, as if somehow they're above it or better than, or it could never happen to them. I couldn't disagree more. I truly believe in the old saying: "There but for the grace of God go I."

I think it might be helpful to share a personal story about someone I know and grew up with whose life ended up with him living on the street and also with him being very impacted by drug addiction.

What happens in a person's life that makes that terrible outcome possible? Is it because they're different than us, that somehow they did something that we would never do that put them there? Their difference from us is the reason.

When I was a kid... I'm going to name this person David, because I want to speak about his story with respect, and I think it's best to give him that anonymity.

[5:10 p.m.]

David and I were very close. We lived for a while on a Gulf Island. There were very few kids, so those of us who lived on this island made our own fun. We'd dig in the sand and make elaborate tracks and capture crabs on the beach and get them to race each other. We grew up together. Later, when I moved to Nanaimo, David also moved to Nanaimo.

I know this person well. We were close, close. David was a science geek and was bullied in school for being so nerdy. But what happened to him was not related to that. It was simply the bad luck of living next to a pedophile. Back then, in the late '70s and early '80s, we didn't talk about child abuse. It was unspoken. When David went from being a great student to missing classes, none of us could understand. When he stole a motorcycle and ran away to California, it seemed unimaginable. When he was arrested for taking food while in California and sent to a

maximum security state penitentiary, even though he was 16, we were out of our minds.

Abuse layered upon abuse. The man who abused David abused many others in my hometown. A social worker that I spoke to about this said she thinks 60 boys were affected. They all suffered unimaginably because we didn't talk about it then. We didn't know how to talk about it, and they kept it hidden. Some committed suicide. One young man killed a woman. A number became homeless, including David. Many became addicted to drugs. This is untreated trauma — an entire generation in my hometown of untreated trauma.

David's drug addiction got control of him, and I think it was because he never spoke about what happened to him. I think he was unable to face the pain, the trauma, and numbing it out was the only way to live. Living on the street came with that, as did the ugly cycle of stealing for drugs, getting arrested for possession, going to jail, sometimes getting clean in jail, but then being unable to find work with a criminal record and no work experience and going back to the street and back to drugs and back to possession and back to getting arrested and back to jail, and so on, and so on, and so on.

David doesn't have a violent bone in his body, but boy, living on the street, he sure experienced it — getting rolled for his, you name it, money, drugs, cigarettes, whatever little thing he had. His life was so often in danger. It was a hell of a way to live. It was hell. Imagine if, rather than criminalizing David, society had realized he was in need of counselling and support. Imagine if he'd been able to find a treatment facility and experienced trauma-informed treatment.

David, with the support of his family and friends, is currently off the streets, is in stable housing and is not using hard drugs. He got clean just prior to the poison drug crisis. I know, I really believe, that were he on the street right now in this current context, he'd very likely be dead.

Things that I've learned from David's struggle: there by the grace of God go I. Anyone, even a brilliant boy from a hard-working family who loved him, can end up addicted and on the street. None of us are better than those living on the street. We're just luckier.

Not addressing trauma at the time it occurs leads to pervasive damage. We need to support people in honest and integral ways when they're subjected to violence and abuse. Child abuse must be brought into the open, and children can and do heal fully, but not when they are made to feel shame and guilt for what happened to them. The victim is never to blame. Society still can make them feel as though they are. We have to do better here. Housing is everything. For us, when David got stable housing, everything improved.

This government cares about what people are going through. We're working hard to create opportunities for

housing, and for those who are addicted, we're creating many opportunities.

[5:15 p.m.]

I want to talk specifically about this motion. The toxic drug crisis is an unprecedented public health emergency that has touched the lives of people around the world and here in B.C. As countless lives are saved by the heroic interventions of first responders, front-line workers, peers, friends and families, we continue to lose people every day to the toxic drug crisis. These devastating are felt all across B.C. — our families, our friends, our neighbors, people like my friend David.

For too long, people have struggled to get the mental health and addiction supports they need, with substance use often being treated as a criminal justice issue instead of a public health matter. Moving out of this public health emergency requires all hands on deck.

Our government is taking a comprehensive approach to addressing the ongoing public health emergency, including acting on decriminalization, adding new treatment and recovery services and investing in new harm reduction supports, like prescribed safe supply. We know there is much more to do, and we won't stop working until we turn the tide on this crisis.

I want to speak a little bit about the opposition. The opposition leader wants people to forget the cuts that contributed to the challenges we're facing now. They made devastating cuts to the social services that help prevent crime and keep communities safe — housing, health and mental health addictions care and poverty reduction. As Health Minister, the opposition leader ordered health authorities to make \$360 million in cuts to deal with a budget shortfall.

We know that cuts from 2001.... Staffing in the adult mental health division of the then Minister of Health was cut by 70 percent. The Mental Health Advocate cuts and beds made a huge difference. When I think about David's story, I think about the lack of resources that were available at that time.

This government is doing things differently. Our government is making historic investments in mental health and addiction supports, including enhancements across the full spectrum of treatment and recovery. We're responding urgently to this crisis by significantly scaling up our response across the full continuum of care, including opening over 360 adult and youth treatment beds, with more in development. We're doubling youth treatment beds. Forty-two new and expanded overdose prevention sites. We're expanding access to prescribed safer supply and expanding access to mental health supports through community counselling, ICY teams.

We're implementing the decriminalization of people who use drugs. For me, that piece is so, so important, having witnessed what it looks like to watch someone who is not a criminal but is someone suffering with terrible addiction be perpetually arrested for small amounts of

drugs, put into jail — especially as a young person put into jail — exposed to incredible harm, only to continue that terrible unbreakable cycle. This piece is so, so integral.

We're funding a tailgate toolkit to help those working in construction access harm reduction services.

B.C. is leading Canada in our response to the toxic drug crisis, using more tools than anywhere else.

We have more than doubled the number of clinicians prescribing medically assisted treatment since we came into government. There are now over 100 nurses who have completed their training to prescribe this treatment. That's a first in Canada. Another 100 are enrolled or in training now. Approximately 24,000 people access this treatment monthly since 2020. Access has been significantly expanded in every health region. Over 3,000 prescribers have helped nearly 12,000 people access safer supply since we launched our prescribed safer supply program in March 2020.

There's more work to be done, and we're committed to continuing the work to turn the tide on the toxic drug crisis in B.C.

[5:20 p.m.]

We're building a full spectrum of care, with diverse options, so people can get the treatment they both need and want. In the last several years, we've been patching holes where urgently needed. Now, through our historic investments, we're beginning to make true system-level change. Our historic investments are supporting a range of services: withdrawal management, transition and assessment, treatment and aftercare services.

We are investing in supporting people through their recovery through services like new out-patient withdrawal management services in multiple locations in the Interior; new treatment and stabilization beds in Kamloops, in Kelowna, in Lillooet; and new sobering and assessment services in Prince George and in my town and David's town, Nanaimo.

Last year alone we opened 105 new treatment beds. Those beds have already helped 624 people. We will continue to add services across B.C. to save lives and support people in accessing treatment.

The toxic drug crisis disproportionately affects Indigenous communities. This has only been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. Our commitment to Indigenous-led mental health and substance use services and supports is a key pillar of the Pathway to Hope.

Our government has invested over \$100 million to support First Nations communities and Indigenous peoples living with mental health and substance use challenges across British Columbia, \$20 million to support the renovation and replacement of First Nations-run treatment centres throughout B.C. and \$38 million to support the design and expansion of land-based and culturally safe treatment. So \$24 million, over three years, will support FNHA with the drug poisoning emergency response. And

\$1.13 million has been provided to Métis Nation B.C. to support Métis-led mental health and wellness initiatives.

Our work does not stop here. There are gender-specific services for women and girls. The mental health and addictions system we inherited when we formed government has many gaps, and this is one of them. We're working hard to find and fill these gaps so everyone in British Columbia can get the help that they need.

As part of our government's unprecedented investments, residential treatment beds for women are being created in a number of health regions. So far this includes funding a range of treatment and recovery services, including bed-based services that are gender specific. So 25 adult substance use treatment and support recovery facilities for women, totalling 202 beds.

One such example is Peardonville House, which offers a 40-bed women-specific service open to mothers and their children. Another example is HerWay Home, which provides beds for pregnant and parenting women aged 16 to 24. In Victoria, the Coastal Sage Healing House just opened, providing treatment beds for women and non-binary individuals.

In regards to safe supply, highly toxic street drugs are rampant, and far too many people are at risk of a fatal overdose. Too many people in our provinces are grieving the loss of someone they love. People need to be alive to get the help they need. We must separate people from the toxic, unregulated drug supply to stop overdose and help people stabilize their lives for a better future.

Since 2017, we've been expanding access to treatment and recovery beds and to medication-assisted treatment. Our government has been providing safer supply since our first phase was launched in 2020. This is the first and the only safer supply program of its kind in Canada. Over the last 2½ years, we've been expanding safe supply, not only the number of locations but also options for medications. Because of our efforts, people in all regions of B.C. are being prescribed safer alternatives to illicit street drugs right now.

Since March 2020, nearly 12,000 people have been connected with prescribed safer supply.

[5:25 p.m.]

In December 2022, over 4,500 people received prescribed safer supply, and 263 of these people were connected to a prescription for the first time.

We are doing this work while making sure patient safety is protected and prescribers have the support that they need. The coroner's monthly reports show that this is working. Safer supply has not been linked to any drug deaths.

This is just one tool in our government's comprehensive approach to combat the poisoned drug crisis. We know that safer supply alone will not solve this crisis. That is why our government is building a system of treatment and recovery so everyone can get the care that they need.

To conclude, there is more work to do, and we're going

to keep doing everything we can to turn the tide on this terrible public health emergency. Our government is taking a comprehensive response to the toxic drug crisis, including treatment and recovery options, medication-assisted treatment, overdose prevention sites and prescribed safer supply.

S. Bond: I appreciate the opportunity to stand in the House today. I have to say that listening to the member that spoke just before me, who went out of her way to reflect on her views of the opposition's response.... I would suggest that when she suggested that this is an unprecedented public health emergency, that is something we agree on. In fact, it needs to be treated like one.

We find ourselves here in the Legislature again today with no new bills. No new bills. Instead, we are speaking to another motion tabled by this government. Now, I absolutely believe that we should be talking about the devastation and trauma of the opioid crisis in our province, but call me just a little bit cynical that the time we get to talk about it is when the government has absolutely nothing else on its agenda and needs to fill some time. That is completely unacceptable.

For this government to have members stand up and list the litany of things that they suggest have made an incredible difference.... I would ask them to go and look at the record. They have had two terms and six years to deal with an opioid crisis in this province that is literally taking the lives of thousands of British Columbians. And what do we see here today? People patting themselves on the back.

The premise of this motion today is the work of the Health Committee. Well, let me tell you, we are standing in the House today debating a motion that, once again, we all agree with. So whether this is some attempt at a gotcha....

I'm not sure what the purpose is, but let me be perfectly clear. When you create an all-party committee, that means all parties contribute. In fact, members from the Green Party, the government, all of us, grappled with this issue in what was a very difficult personal journey for many of the committee members, including myself. So to stand here and speak to a motion that plucks two or three things out of a report that was tabled in this Legislature months ago.... I will leave it to you to speculate as to why that would be happening this afternoon.

Let's be clear. We are debating a motion we all agree with. Now, I want to be clear that we may have a different approach to some of the things that are noted in the motion. Of course we do, and I'm going to get to some of those. But that's what the committee grappled with.

[J. Tegart in the chair.]

In fact, it was a credit to the Chair of that committee, the now Attorney General of British Columbia, that she gave us the space to have the tough decisions necessary.

[5:30 p.m.]

The public supply of addictive drugs — of course we should ask hard questions about how that works. In fact, where the committee landed was on prescribed supply of drugs. That's what the motion should read. It doesn't.

Again, people can speculate as to why that is the case, but there was an all-party committee. The report was tabled in this Legislature months ago with unanimous agreement after months and months of work, listening to hundreds of British Columbians make presentations to that committee.

Yes, we've grappled with issues like decriminalization, and I will speak to that in just a moment, but I think we have to ask ourselves why this is on the agenda today. Is it filling time because the government has no agenda, or is it an attempt to politicize the work that was done by an all-party committee?

As I speak to this motion, I am going to remind every single member of this House, especially the government members standing up and listing the things they consider accomplishments, what it took to get the Standing Committee on Health activated to do this work. It is ironic that the motion is to support the work done and the subsequent report that took us a year — a year — to have this government say yes to a committee.

While the numbers skyrocketed and people lost brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers, we had to convince the government to actually allow the Health Committee to do its work, and here we are today cherry-picking a few of the things out of the report and: "Let's have a motion, and let's talk about that in the Legislature." That is shameful.

The leader of the Green Party and myself called for the activation of the Health Committee for a year, while opioid deaths continued and the crisis raged on in this province, and this government stubbornly refused to activate the Standing Committee on Health for a year. Report after report said the same thing to this government. Here's what they said, in a nutshell: "More has to be done. More must be done. It must be treated with urgency." And the bottom line: lives literally depended on it.

Here's the thing. The Standing Committee on Health heard exactly the same thing over and over again. We can have government members stand here and read off a litany of things that they would tout as urgent action, yet I can tell you that I will never forget story after story at the Standing Committee on Health — devastation, trauma, loss.

Here's what we heard, ironically, again, not mentioned in the motion to debate the report. We heard about serious gaps in services, lack of access. To what? Treatment and recovery. Why? Because this government has failed to focus on treatment and recovery for six years.

When people reach out during that moment in their lives that they want and need help, what did we hear? Help was not available. We can hear about the beds that

have been added here and the program there. What this government has been told over and over again is that there was no overarching systemic approach to how to deal with this crisis.

One of the things that struck me most, that people referred to — and, in fact, many of the reports referred to it as well, the presentations we received — is that if this situation had been treated with the urgency that the COVID response had been treated with, we would be in a very different place today. There were daily reports. There were statistics. There were plans, and everyone was.... It was all hands on deck. Yet month after month, we get coroner's reports in this province that report the number of people who lost their lives. In between, we hear nothing.

[5:35 p.m.]

The work that was done by the Health Committee and that this motion is purportedly based on resulted in a significant number of recommendations. What we should be talking about today in this Legislature is the response to the recommendations. They come as no surprise, because report after report said the same thing to this government over the course of years.

Do we have concerns about decriminalization and its implementation? Yes, we do. So should the government. The federal government laid out very, very specific criteria before implementation should move ahead. There are deep concerns, as my colleague suggested earlier, that the checklist has not been met.

Should we be asking those questions? Of course we should. But this motion would seem to imply that we don't support the issues that are listed in the motion. That is not the case. But our job is to ask the hard questions. In fact, we heard concerns about decriminalization at the Health Committee, and they were reflected in our report.

Here's perhaps the most key issue. When someone is stopped, they are supposed to be provided with resources and supports. That's how it works in Portugal. Everyone talks about the Portugal model. Well, guess what. What exactly are first responders supposed to do when they make that stop and hand out the card that says, "Here's the information," and — guess what — there is no help available?

That is the premise that the federal government laid out — that whether you live in rural B.C. or in urban British Columbia, if you are stopped, as part of the decriminalization process, you will be given an opportunity to find support. There is none in many communities across British Columbia. How on earth is that going to work when we don't have services now? Should those questions be asked of the government? Of course they should.

The motion also ignores some very key elements of the recommendations that the Standing Committee on Health made. It's interesting to note that the motion doesn't mention prevention. I can assure you that at the Standing Committee on Health, one of the things we talked about

was the fact that it is a complete spectrum of care. That starts with education. It includes prevention.

Again, look at the wording of the motion. Where are the words "education" and "prevention"? They aren't in the motion.

Well, what else does the motion ignore? I'm going to note several of those things. The words might sound familiar. They are, because I raised these issues with the government at the tabling of this report. We have heard nothing about that in response. Over and over again, what our Health Committee heard was that there is a lack of coordination between ministries and organizations — a pretty significant gap.

We heard that over 70 percent of the people who died had had a visit with a health professional less than three months before their death. And imagine this. Thirty percent of them had ten or more visits in the three months prior to their death. People recently released from prison died at seven times the rate of other B.C. residents — pretty important and critical touchpoints.

Something is desperately wrong. Despite the fact that today and probably tomorrow we're going to hear government members get up and talk about everything that's been done and, "We've made progress," 70 percent of the people who died had a visit with a health professional. How could that be working? It isn't.

Others who came to the Health Committee spoke passionately about the window of opportunity, that moment when people bravely ask for help.

[5:40 p.m.]

What did we learn? They didn't cite all the numbers and programs that we're hearing this afternoon. Do you know what they said? They said that there are wait-lists. When you ask for help and they say, "Come back three weeks from now," it does not work. If you live in rural or remote areas of the province, there's very little hope that that window of opportunity would be met.

As a committee, we also desperately asked that the actions be taken in an urgent way, as I said, dealing with the health crisis just as we did with the pandemic. We must move beyond facing a crisis month after month. That is not a surprise to this government. They have been told over and over again that the system that they have in place is not working.

What the report outlines is the need for a continuum of care. It starts with prevention and education, conveniently left out of this motion, and finding the words and the ways to talk about the risk of drugs and giving children and families information, tools and support.

It is also interesting to note that the most frequent issues that were raised with the committee were related to the ability to access treatment and recovery services. Frankly, it is simply not good enough to listen to the members opposite stand up and talk about how they have done so much. That is not what we heard. That is not what this gov-

ernment has heard from the coroner, from organizations across this province, from Indigenous organizations.

We certainly did not hear that at the Health Committee. In fact, we heard this: that individuals may die on waitlists before being able to access service. Maybe the member who spoke before me would like to come back and respond to that with their list of accomplishments. That is not acceptable in the province of British Columbia.

The people that have spoken continue to talk about what the opposition did. Well I can tell you what they did. In fact, what we did was invest billions of dollars in services and supports. We created a model that focused on treatment and recovery. We actually put \$100 million dollars after announcing that it was a public health emergency. By the way, we created the Foundry program which, for parents across this province, many of them, it is their lifeline. It is their hope.

The opposition, in contrast to what was suggested by the member opposite, actually had a substantive plan. But let's be clear. This is a two-term, six-year government who continues to suggest that everything's okay here. We know that's not the case — even the fact we're having a motion to talk about the work of the Health Committee when instead they should be looking at every single recommendation and putting a plan in place to do something about it.

The report spoke poignantly about things that needed to be done. One of the things that it spoke about was there needs to be an overarching government response, not one program here and there, not a few beds here and there. But let me quote from the report. The government needed to “rapidly scale up flexible, evidence-based, low-barrier, comprehensive continuum of care that spans the social determinants of health, prevention and education, harm reduction, safer supply, treatment and recovery.” It goes on. The report goes on with 37 very specific recommendations that took months before it was tabled in this Legislature.

Are we talking about those recommendations today? No. We're talking about a motion to support the work that's in the report that we tabled unanimously in this Legislature.

One of the things that mattered so very much to people was making sure that we have a recovery-oriented and treatment-oriented focus. Let's be clear. Five years after the creation of a specific Ministry for Mental Health and Addictions, people in need are no better off as they face deadlier street drugs, months-long waits for treatment and a lack of beds for withdrawal management and unaffordable, privately-run services.

[5:45 p.m.]

Imagine hitting that window of opportunity and watching your son or your daughter finally say: “I need help.” What we heard over and over again was that help is not available. What we should be debating here in the House today is how are we going to fix that.

I'm going to continue to remind this Legislature every

time I get a chance to speak up that we have a new Premier that wrote in mandate letters to every single minister in this Legislature. Here is what he said: “British Columbians expect their elected representatives to work together to advance public good. This means seeking out, fostering and championing good ideas, regardless of their origin. I expect you to reach out to elected members from all parties as you deliver on your mandate.”

Let me make some suggestions to the minister responsible for mental health and addictions, because we've spent a lot of time listening and learning and looking at what would make a difference in British Columbia. Do you know the conclusion we came to? That better is possible. We have a roadmap that would change things for the better. A dramatic shift that the Leader of the Opposition has suggested. It is a bold plan that would overhaul the delivery of mental health services, and it would focus on building a recovery-oriented system of care.

After I sat on Health Committee and I listened to those stories, we worked together. We learned. It is about time we made that dramatic shift in British Columbia. We know that better is possible, so today, why are we not debating that, instead of talking about a motion to fill time in this place? Because we know that we can build on the innovative models like the Red Fish Healing Centre, which, by the way, the opposition added beds to that particular program. What we need to do is actually....

Interjection.

S. Bond: I will not rise to that bait.

We need to ensure that no matter where you live in British Columbia, you have the same kind of model and that opportunity, so that people with severe and complex needs can get compassionate 24-7 psychosocial support. That means better is possible.

We will eliminate user fees. Can you imagine hitting that window of opportunity and finding out that you can't afford the treatment? What we would do is eliminate user fees at publicly funded addiction treatment beds and provide direct government funding for private beds, because money shouldn't determine whether or not you get well in this province. We heard that at Health Committee. We've heard that in our communities. Every MLA in this Legislature has heard that.

We also know that addiction isn't an issue and opioid deaths are not issues just in urban British Columbia. They exist in our communities across the province. In fact, someone should go take a look at the numbers in the communities that I represent. The numbers are devastating. When members opposite stand up and talk about everything they've done to make things better, they should come and talk to the people in my community who have no resources and who have no supports. Families that are at their wit's end trying to find support for their children.

We're going to build regional recovery communities

where people who are struggling with addiction can stay for up to a year with individualized holistic treatment support. We know this: the status quo is not working. Doing more of the same is not going to drive better results. Instead of having this debate, which is trying to perpetuate an endless debate of whether it's harm reduction or recovery, we need to provide real supports for people who need it — people who want to overcome addiction. We need to give them every single opportunity to get better.

[5:50 p.m.]

Our approach is about using every possible tool in the toolbox. Yes, that includes harm reduction, publicly supplied addictive drugs, but that can't be the entire approach.

We heard at Health Committee that resources, treatment beds, support for recovery do not exist in many parts of this province. So for the government to suggest that that has been their focus.... The evidence simply does not back that up.

The other thing. One of the biggest gaps we have in our system — we heard this at Health Committee, and, in fact, there are recommendations related to it — is the lack of data and transparency. It's essential that we urgently ask that the government begin to establish detailed data systems to track performance measures and targets and benchmark the number of publicly funded mental health and addiction treatment beds available to British Columbians. This will measure performance outcomes and ensure that we have standardization of care.

We know this. The status quo is not working, and doing more of the same is simply not going to drive better results.

Today I want to urge the government to think about what comes before this Legislature. There are recommendations in the Health Committee report that require legislation, including standardization of services that are available. What we need is a coherent provincewide strategy throughout British Columbia so that when somebody reaches out for help, they can immediately get the services, and they can afford them. It is inexcusable that we continue to hear the government talk about the things that they have done without looking at the outcomes.

You know, the really difficult part about the timing of this motion.... We've had a lot of time to talk about this issue since it became a public health crisis. It took us a year to convince the government to stand up the Select Standing Committee on Health. I'm grateful to my colleague and friend the leader of the Green Party. Together, we literally raised it for an entire year.

Guess what. I can only imagine.... I don't think the Health Committee is going to be stood up again, despite the crisis we're facing across British Columbia, whether it's the opioid crisis or the lack of family doctors or hospitals closing all over the place. Nope. Apparently, not enough important work to do there. It took us a year to get this government to even acknowledge that cross-party work on this issue was important.

Until our plan was announced, Better Is Possible, that

lays out a comprehensive map with a focus on recovery and treatment, education, prevention — all of those things — I don't think this motion was scheduled. So it is time for the Premier to live up to the words that he put in his ministers' mandate letters.

It's not just the words on a piece of paper. All of us have experienced it. Ministers come to our communities. They don't even talk to us about the issues in our communities directly. We were elected there because people know we know those communities, and we know them well.

Let me remind the government what the Premier said: "British Columbians expect their elected representatives to work together to advance public good." What area could be more important in British Columbia today than starting to deal in a meaningful, holistic, systematic way with an opioid crisis that has killed thousands of British Columbians?

He goes on to say: "This means seeking out, fostering and championing good ideas, regardless of their origin." Better Is Possible is full of good ideas. It is full of thoughtful suggestions about what would make a difference.

[5:55 p.m.]

Wouldn't it be amazing if tomorrow, in the budget, there was a substantive budget announcement and that what is described, as a result of that investment, looks an awful lot like Better Is Possible? You know what? I know this. Despite this motion today, which is some attempt to find a wedge between us on these critical issues, wouldn't it be amazing?

I can tell you that I know this about my leader, the Leader of the Opposition. What he cares about most is that people get the help they need. If that means that when the budget is presented and the plan that the NDP eventually offers up looks an awful lot like Better Is Possible, we'll be okay with that.

What matters is that it is high beyond time that this government took the urgent action that is required and made sure that there is a focus on a complete spectrum of care. We know that better is possible, and it is time that the NDP government understood that better is necessary.

Hon. S. Malcolmson: I am honoured to speak, from the government side, on the motion that this House affirm its support for a spectrum of addictions care. I am going to speak to the work of the select standing committee and the recommendations that all three parties agreed on and that our government agrees on.

Let me first say to anybody who is watching at home, if they've just listened to the MLA for Prince George-Valemount, that I take the member's point. We want people to have treatment on demand. We want people, when they reach out for any form of health care, to be able to get the care that they're asking for in the moment. That is exactly the system that we are building towards, but I want people at home to know that there is help available for them.

There have never been so many people in British Columbia connected with care across the entire spectrum. We want people reaching out for help. We want you to know that help is available for you, and if you can't get it right away, in the time that you need, then we need to hear that you haven't been able to connect with it. Please, we don't want people to be dissuaded by the previous member's comments, to say that there is not help for them, because it's not true.

We agree: the status quo isn't working. That's why we are investing unprecedented amounts into the addiction treatment system. If we had not had such colossal increases in drug toxicity over the course of the pandemic, it's hard to say where we would be, but certainly, the increased toxicity of the illicit street supply has outstripped the pace with which we have added new addiction treatment beds and new forms of harm reduction.

To go from a 4 percent to an 8 percent drug toxicity to a 28 percent drug toxicity level is unprecedented. It is killing people, and that is unacceptable. That status quo is unacceptable. That's what we're working every day to defeat.

I agree with the member. We do need data. We are gathering data on addiction treatment outcomes and usage — and all of the data from the new beds that we have funded and have opened up, 360 in the last couple of years.

I will note what I know about the Leader of the Opposition is that when he was Minister of State for Deregulation, he ripped up regulations for treatment and recovery homes. That allowed treatment operators to operate without licences, not registered or supervised by the province. It allowed those operators....

Many of those unregulated homes were unsafe for residents — people who needed care and didn't have that consistency. That is the record of the Leader of the Opposition: to deregulate addiction treatment beds. We would sure have a lot more data in hand if that deregulation had not happened.

[6:00 p.m.]

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members. Members, the minister has the floor.

Hon. S. Malcolmson: The spectrum of addictions care that we are building in British Columbia and that all three parties support...

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Powell River–Sunshine Coast, the minister has the floor.

Hon. S. Malcolmson: ...is supported by all three parties here, for which I am grateful, and is reflected in the report. We have unprecedented consensus coming out of the all-

party committee's work for support for safe consumption sites, for decriminalization, for prescribed safe supply, things that I think even just a couple of years ago we would not have expected to have political consensus on. That, I think, points very strongly to the depth of the emergency British Columbians are facing and the fact that we need to do things in different ways.

I do recognize that this was a big step forward for a lot of members of this House, and I'm really grateful for the consensus that is articulated. I will say in addition, though, that I was challenged on this by some people working on the front line in Courtenay and people with lived experience at a really beautiful event that happened outside the Courtenay art gallery, called Walk with Me.

They said, "We presented to the select committee, and we really wanted to see much more bold recommendations." They said they wanted to see a bolder approach to decriminalization as well. They were disappointed that the federal government approved only a 2.5-gram threshold instead of the 4.5, and they thought that in my role as minister — I was Minister of Mental Health and Addictions at the time — I should have been clear in my public comments that, by their take, some of these are half-measures.

I think it's important for me to reaffirm that the consensus report of the select committee was a consensus report. It did not represent the full breadth of what some of the 800-plus participants brought to the committee. I think we all want them to know that their voices were heard and that there's recognition that there is a broader range of tools and approaches that are out there in the public sphere. I'll say again, as I did in Courtenay: that all three parties came to this consensus, I think, is unprecedented, appreciated and important.

The response to the toxic drug crisis requires that. This is an unprecedented public health emergency. Countless lives have been saved by people who have been working on the front line, but countless lives have been lost. It's a heartbreaking, devastating and — despite a reduction in the number of lives lost in 2019 — still a terrible loss of life that is unacceptable.

It requires an all-hands-on-deck approach, and requires that we continue to evolve our response. That is what our government has done under the newly created Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, set up by the Premier in 2017. In the five years since, building out Pathway to Hope, we have continued to evolve that response.

Decriminalization was not imagined at that time; prescribed safe supply, not imagined at that time. Some of the new approaches to addiction treatment — prescribing, using nurses, for example, medication-assisted treatment, let alone some of the trauma-informed approaches to treatment and bed-based recovery, all of these — were not envisioned in 2017 and are all directly part of our plan now. We will continue to evolve that response. There will surely be more innovations that come.

Let me go through some of the recommendations of the

select committee, for the benefit of the public and people watching at home, the first recommendation being to “rapidly scale up a flexible, evidence-based...comprehensive continuum of care that spans the social determinants of health, prevention and education, harm reduction, safer supply, and treatment and recovery.” I agree, and our government agrees, that there was not that system of care in 2017. That’s why our ministry was created.

[6:05 p.m.]

The investments to build out that continuum of care have been also unprecedented, with a \$500 million investment in 2021, including \$132 million for treatment and recovery, bed-based care, across the full spectrum of care. Building that system of care was in my mandate letter as minister in 2020 and was at the centre of my work for the last two years.

There are a number of ways within the system.... I think we can picture how that works. Foundry is a great example, which the previous speaker alluded to — I think three Foundries opened by the old government and another 20 that we either have opened or are just on the verge of opening.

A young person between the ages of 12 to 26 can walk into a Foundry — maybe it’s for primary health care; maybe it’s for birth control, reproductive support — and they also have the ability to get connected with mental health counselling, with addictions treatment, with referrals to other agencies. That’s an example of that continuum of care in one place and the reaches into it.

Another is the Duncan Wellness Centre — fiercely opposed by some neighbours but championed by Island Health Authority, funded through my ministry — where someone comes in for supervised consumption, either injection or inhalation, but on their way in, they pass by a primary care provider’s office. It might be a doctor or a nurse that’s on hand there at that time.

When I visited there, I saw this interaction described. The doctor or nurse would say: “Paul, it looks like you might be limping. Have you hurt your knee?” It turns out that some of these folks have been completely alienated from health care support. Their getting brought in because of a substance use problem but then getting connected into the health care system has been a real success. It was only opened less than a year ago but is really inspiring and has already connected people with care.

At the other end of the room, there’s a nurse funded through the federal SUAP program, substance use and addictions program, prescribing medication-assisted treatment and safe supply as a way to attend to people’s withdrawal so that they’re able to stabilize and then move into treatment and recovery.

St. Paul’s Hospital — also a model of immediate access and intake where someone that comes in, in a substance use emergency, can be connected directly with detox, directly into bed-based treatment and then the stabilization

care that follows treatment, so that we don’t lose people in the gaps in between.

We want treatment to be on demand. We want more support for navigation for people that have been alienated from care and from the system of care. We want to fill the gaps so that people between treatment and detox, between treatment and afterwards, get the stabilization care. Those are beds that we have also offered, so that people do not relapse and don’t fall through the cracks while waiting for a new form of treatment.

The next recommendation I wanted to speak to is No. 5, increasing funding for public awareness and anti-stigma initiatives. This is within the prevention category — also a strong recommendation, a consensus recommendation by the select committee and also something that is consistent with the work that our government has been doing and is continuing to fund and will further expand.

We’re grateful for the partnership of stakeholders, really important stakeholders like WorkSafeBC — getting at that intersection of occupational injury, workplace stresses that can lead to unsafe substance use, the relationship between pain management and addiction — using the voices of people with lived and living experience. The whole peer worker program that MMHA funded and that health authorities are tapping into is an extremely important professional contribution to this whole sector.

The importance of working in multiple languages and cultures and recognizing triggering language in certain communities, working directly with employers, like we do with the Tailgate Toolkit program we funded through Island Health and the Vancouver Island Construction Association, then expanded.... It’s totally scalable. Now we’ve funded it to go across the whole province, where substance use safety talks and overdose prevention and connections to treatment are all becoming part of the morning tailgate safety talk on construction sites.

[6:10 p.m.]

Our Stop the Stigma campaign has been funded and expanded in many different iterations, whether it’s working with partners like Vancouver Canucks and B.C. Lions. Young men, middle-aged men being the ones dying at the most terrible numbers in our province, this connection to sports has been really important. That is work that we agree, on the prevention side, is necessary. We agree with the select committee’s recommendation. It’s consistent with work that we are doing, and we need to do more.

Again on the prevention side, recommendation 9 is one that I wanted to speak to as well, which is to “ensure the availability of provincewide, standardized...harm reduction services, including overdose prevention and drug-checking services.” Again, that’s a direct quote.

There was one supervised consumption site in British Columbia when we formed government in 2017. There are now, I believe, 42. I think about one-third of those are inhalation, which is, as the coroner has noted, increasingly

at the root of loss of life in the toxic drug poisoning crisis, so it has been especially important for us to stand up.

Every health authority is funded by the province. Every health authority is standing up overdose prevention site services. There's a new one in my community, right across the road from my constituency office, where just in its first month of operation.... It's the first inhalation-oriented supervised consumption site in Nanaimo. The visitation has been extremely encouraging.

Also part of this recommendation, drug-checking is also being delivered through this Island Health Authority-funded program in Nanaimo operated by the Canadian Mental Health Association. There are now drug-checking services available seven days a week. Again, a really important time, where we have such terribly increased toxicity in the illicit street supply, if people want to make different decisions about how, whether or how much they will use an illicit drug to which they are addicted.

It's very important to say this. People that don't feel they've got any alternative other than to use substances can bring a couple of grains of illicit drugs into a drug-checking centre and be able to find out how toxic it is, which will inform whether they use just a little tiny bit or maybe decide not to use at all.

We have now over 80 distributed drug-checking sites across the province, in every health authority, and we want there to be more. Those sites.... Some of them are distributed sites where you can either mail in supplies or where hubs can gather the data and then send it into a central site electronically for analysis and then right back out. Those rural delivery mechanisms reduce rural inequities and improve access to the service.

Our government invested in HarmCheck also. That came out of Vancouver Island University, in Nanaimo, using mass spectrometry technology to give an instantaneous and extremely detailed breakdown of what substances are in illicit street drugs. Where it used to be just a yes-no on a fentanyl strip, mass spectrometers are really changing the game, and I'm so proud of the VIU students that designed these works. They are now partnering with Substance here in Victoria to make those approaches even more accessible and more cutting edge.

I'm going to speak a little bit later about decriminalization, but I do want to note that the person bringing illicit substances in for drug-checking, before decriminalization was brought into place, was at some risk. There's another example of breaking stigma, removing the taboo but also asserting that this is a health care crisis and that this is a health care response. If somebody wants to do the responsible thing about checking substances, we don't want there to be any risk of them being criminally charged, so that's a really important step in decriminalization. We are building up more health care responses, and decriminalization is removing one of the barriers to using those responses.

[6:15 p.m.]

Another recommendation of the committee, recommendations 11 and 12, was to "ensure a prescribed safe supply of substances is available in all areas of the province." We agree. We started prescribed safe supply in 2020. We expanded it in July 2021 based on the advice of people with lived experience and people on the front line. That was something that Dr. Bonnie Henry and I announced the expansion of, so that every health authority is required to deliver a prescribed safe supply through its programmatic settings.

Between March 2020 and July 2022, more than 14,000 people have access to prescribed safe supply. We, I think soon, are going to have a dashboard launched on this, if it isn't public already, where people can see numbers of uptake of who's being prescribed.

Then we now have some 6,120 prescribers that are connecting people, again, on a medical basis with something that can stabilize them and then, we hope, give them the solidity and stability — keep them alive, because it's a medically-based supply — and have them have the opportunity to connect with a bed-based treatment and recovery.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Which leads to recommendation 14, which is about treatment. The recommendation to fund "a substantial increase in publicly funded, evidence-based, accredited treatment and recovery beds," including managed withdrawal and after care supports.

I see the Speaker before me. Are you suggesting that I make my final sentence here? Okay, great.

I want to say two things about some of the over 300 new treatment beds that we have opened in just the last couple of years.

In Nanaimo, an example of the continuum of care that we are working to build is expressed through specific beds that we have opened. There are sobering and assessment beds, now ten of them, that have been used at between 85 and 100 percent capacity every night. Someone actively in substance use will sleep safely. In the morning, they have a conversation about whether they want to go to detox. The people working at the Nanaimo sobering assessment beds can get people into detox often the next day or the day after, and they can keep them there in the sobering and assessment beds if it's just a couple-of-day gap.

Clearview Detox had to really reduce its capacity during COVID, but it's right back up to numbers. It's used heavily all the time. We've opened 20 bed-based treatment, publicly funded beds. There were none in Nanaimo before. Now there are 20. There are more to come. We've also opened new stabilization beds so that people have a place to go in between detox and treatment or after treatment so that they can lock in.

We have got a lot more work to do in this regard, but those investments, just over the last couple of years, can give a picture of what it means to have a continuum of

care and how we're filling the gaps in between the steps of treatment.

With that, I'd like to reserve my place, if I may.

Hon. S. Malcolmson moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. S. Robinson moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 6:19 p.m.

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