LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
of BRITISH COLUMBIA

First Session, 43rd Parliament

OFFICIAL REPORT OF DEBATES

(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 20, 2025
Afternoon Sitting
Issue No. 5

THE HONOURABLE RAJ CHOUHAN, SPEAKER

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PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Her Honour the Honourable Wendy Cocchia, CM, OBC

First Session, 43rd Parliament

SPEAKER OF THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Honourable Raj Chouhan

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Beare, Hon. Lisa ..... Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows
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Blatherwick, Jennifer ..... Coquitlam-Maillardville
Boyle, Hon. Christine ..... Vancouver–Little Mountain
Brar, Hon. Jagrup ..... Surrey-Fleetwood
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Chant, Susie ..... North Vancouver–Seymour
Choi, Paul ..... Burnaby South–Metrotown
Chouhan, Hon. Raj ..... Burnaby–New Westminster
Chow, Hon. George ..... Vancouver-Fraserview
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Dhir, Sunita ..... Vancouver-Langara
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Morissette, Steve ..... Kootenay Monashee
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Shah, Amna ..... Surrey City Centre
Sharma, Hon. Niki, KC ..... Vancouver-Hastings
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Yung, Hon. Terry ..... Vancouver-Yaletown

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Banman, Bruce ..... Abbotsford South
Bhangu, Harman ..... Langley-Abbotsford
Bird, Rosalyn ..... Prince George–Valemount
Block, Lynne ..... West Vancouver–Capilano
Boultbee, Amelia ..... Penticton-Summerland
Brodie, Dallas ..... Vancouver-Quilchena
Chan, Hon ..... Richmond Centre
Chapman, Brent ..... Surrey South
Clare, Sheldon ..... Prince George–North Cariboo
Davis, Pete ..... Kootenay Rockies
Day, Brennan ..... Courtenay-Comox
Dew, Gavin ..... Kelowna-Mission
Dhaliwal, Mandeep ..... Surrey North
Doerkson, Lorne ..... Cariboo-Chilcotin
Gasper, Reann ..... Abbotsford-Mission
Giddens, Kiel ..... Prince George–Mackenzie
Halford, Trevor ..... Surrey–White Rock
Hartwell, Sharon ..... Bulkley Valley–Stikine
Hepner, Linda ..... Surrey–Serpentine River
Kealy, Jordan ..... Peace River North
Kindy, Anna ..... North Island
Kooner, Steve ..... Richmond-Queensborough
Loewen, Kristina ..... Kelowna Centre
Luck, Tony ..... Fraser-Nicola
Maahs, Heather ..... Chilliwack North
McCall, Macklin ..... West Kelowna–Peachland
McInnis, Scott ..... Columbia River–Revelstoke
Milobar, Peter ..... Kamloops Centre
Mok, Lawrence ..... Maple Ridge East
Neufeld, Korky ..... Abbotsford West
Neufeld, Larry ..... Peace River South
Paton, Ian ..... Delta South
Rattée, Claire ..... Skeena
Rustad, John ..... Nechako Lakes
Stamer, Ward ..... Kamloops–North Thompson
Sturko, Elenore ..... Surrey-Cloverdale
Tepper, Bryan ..... Surrey-Panorama
Toor, Jody ..... Langley-Willowbrook
Van Popta, Misty ..... Langley–Walnut Grove
Warbus, Á'a:líya ..... Chilliwack–Cultus Lake
Wat, Teresa ..... Richmond-Bridgeport
Williams, David ..... Salmon Arm–Shuswap
Wilson, Donegal ..... Boundary-Similkameen

BC GREEN PARTY

Botterell, Rob ..... Saanich North and the Islands
Valeriote, Jeremy ..... West Vancouver–Sea to Sky

PARTY STANDINGS

Total seats – 93

BC NDP – 47 | Conservative Party of BC – 44 | BC Green Party – 2

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF RIDINGS

A

Abbotsford-Mission ..... Reann Gasper
Abbotsford South ..... Bruce Banman
Abbotsford West ..... Korky Neufeld

B

Boundary-Similkameen ..... Donegal Wilson
Bulkley Valley–Stikine ..... Sharon Hartwell
Burnaby Centre ..... Hon. Anne Kang
Burnaby East ..... Rohini Arora
Burnaby–New Westminster ..... Hon. Raj Chouhan
Burnaby North ..... Janet Routledge
Burnaby South–Metrotown ..... Paul Choi

C

Cariboo-Chilcotin ..... Lorne Doerkson
Chilliwack–Cultus Lake ..... Á'a:líya Warbus
Chilliwack North ..... Heather Maahs
Columbia River–Revelstoke ..... Scott McInnis
Coquitlam–Burke Mountain ..... Hon. Jodie Wickens
Coquitlam-Maillardville ..... Jennifer Blatherwick
Courtenay-Comox ..... Brennan Day
Cowichan Valley ..... Debra Toporowski / Qwulti'stunaat

D

Delta North ..... Hon. Ravi Kahlon
Delta South ..... Ian Paton

E

Esquimalt-Colwood ..... Darlene Rotchford

F

Fraser-Nicola ..... Tony Luck

J

Juan de Fuca–Malahat ..... Dana Lajeunesse

K

Kamloops Centre ..... Peter Milobar
Kamloops–North Thompson ..... Ward Stamer
Kelowna Centre ..... Kristina Loewen
Kelowna–Lake Country–Coldstream ..... Tara Armstrong
Kelowna-Mission ..... Gavin Dew
Kootenay Central ..... Hon. Brittny Anderson
Kootenay Monashee ..... Steve Morissette
Kootenay Rockies ..... Pete Davis

L

Ladysmith-Oceanside ..... Stephanie Higginson
Langford-Highlands ..... Hon. Ravi Parmar
Langley-Abbotsford ..... Harman Bhangu
Langley–Walnut Grove ..... Misty Van Popta
Langley-Willowbrook ..... Jody Toor

M

Maple Ridge East ..... Lawrence Mok
Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows ..... Hon. Lisa Beare
Mid Island–Pacific Rim ..... Hon. Josie Osborne

N

Nanaimo–Gabriola Island ..... Hon. Sheila Malcolmson
Nanaimo-Lantzville ..... George Anderson
Nechako Lakes ..... John Rustad
New Westminster–Coquitlam ..... Hon. Jennifer Whiteside
North Coast–Haida Gwaii ..... Hon. Laanas / Tamara Davidson
North Island ..... Anna Kindy
North Vancouver–Lonsdale ..... Hon. Bowinn Ma
North Vancouver–Seymour ..... Susie Chant

O

Oak Bay–Gordon Head ..... Hon. Diana Gibson

P

Peace River North ..... Jordan Kealy
Peace River South ..... Larry Neufeld
Penticton-Summerland ..... Amelia Boultbee
Port Coquitlam ..... Hon. Mike Farnworth
Port Moody–Burquitlam ..... Hon. Rick Glumac
Powell River–Sunshine Coast ..... Hon. Randene Neill
Prince George–Mackenzie ..... Kiel Giddens
Prince George–North Cariboo ..... Sheldon Clare
Prince George–Valemount ..... Rosalyn Bird

R

Richmond-Bridgeport ..... Teresa Wat
Richmond Centre ..... Hon Chan
Richmond-Queensborough ..... Steve Kooner
Richmond-Steveston ..... Hon. Kelly Greene

S

Saanich North and the Islands ..... Rob Botterell
Saanich South ..... Hon. Lana Popham
Salmon Arm–Shuswap ..... David Williams
Skeena ..... Claire Rattée
Surrey City Centre ..... Amna Shah
Surrey-Cloverdale ..... Elenore Sturko
Surrey-Fleetwood ..... Hon. Jagrup Brar
Surrey-Guildford ..... Hon. Garry Begg
Surrey-Newton ..... Jessie Sunner
Surrey North ..... Mandeep Dhaliwal
Surrey-Panorama ..... Bryan Tepper
Surrey–Serpentine River ..... Linda Hepner
Surrey South ..... Brent Chapman
Surrey–White Rock ..... Trevor Halford

V

Vancouver-Fraserview ..... Hon. George Chow
Vancouver-Hastings ..... Hon. Niki Sharma, KC
Vancouver-Kensington ..... Mable Elmore
Vancouver-Langara ..... Sunita Dhir
Vancouver–Little Mountain ..... Hon. Christine Boyle
Vancouver–Point Grey ..... Hon. David Eby, KC
Vancouver-Quilchena ..... Dallas Brodie
Vancouver-Renfrew ..... Hon. Adrian Dix
Vancouver–South Granville ..... Hon. Brenda Bailey
Vancouver-Strathcona ..... Amshen / Joan Phillip
Vancouver–West End ..... Hon. Spencer Chandra Herbert
Vancouver-Yaletown ..... Hon. Terry Yung
Vernon-Lumby ..... Harwinder Sandhu
Victoria–Beacon Hill ..... Hon. Grace Lore
Victoria–Swan Lake ..... Nina Krieger

W

West Kelowna–Peachland ..... Macklin McCall
West Vancouver–Capilano ..... Lynne Block
West Vancouver–Sea to Sky ..... Jeremy Valeriote

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Linda Hepner
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Anna Kindy
Hon. Mike Farnworth

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2025

The House met at 1:02 p.m.

[The Speaker in the chair.]

The Speaker: Member for Esquimalt-Colwood.

Darlene Rotchford: It's my honour to be here today and acknowledge the privilege that it is to be standing on the traditional and unceded territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən-speaking peoples, today known as Esquimalt and Songhees Nations.

The Speaker: Member, are you starting the speech on the throne speech?

Darlene Rotchford: Yes. My apologies, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Take a seat. We'll recognize you later.

Orders of the Day

Hon. Mike Farnworth: I call address in reply to the throne speech.

Throne Speech Debate
(continued)

Darlene Rotchford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your grace. I look across the floor at my colleagues and my colleagues here as we are all new and in this together.

Again, I am privileged to be standing on the traditional and unceded territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən-speaking peoples, today known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. I am honoured to be the MLA on the land of these nations and even more honoured to have my office located between them in the community.

I look forward to being able to work together in partnership during my time as an MLA with all nations across the province.

I would like to thank the people of Esquimalt-Colwood who voted for me. In a world where we're all busy, I am grateful for those who took the time to go to a voting station, submitted a mail ballot or voted by phone for me.

[Mable Elmore in the chair.]

I am a person who truly appreciates people's time.

Thank you, all. Thank you for your stories. I heard so many good stories about the work that's being done across our community, but also the challenges we're still facing. It highlighted the work that we still have to do.

To my campaign manager, Tanya Mallo: thank you for your long hours of work helping me during the election.

For anyone who didn't know, I was a very last-minute candidate, and we just hit the ground running. Tanya stepped up and managed my campaign when my predecessor became unwell prior to being able to run in the election.

[1:05 p.m.]

Saying we were all flying by the seat of our pants definitely would have been an understatement during this campaign. Every day was a new day, and she took it all in stride.

Thank you to Sarena and Caleb, who were the jack and jill, literally, of all trades.

No task was too great for you both. I cannot even begin to express my gratitude to you both during the campaign. You held me up during times of self-doubt, physical and mental exhaustion, and reminded me about the importance of making sure the Legislature has people that represent all of our communities, and that we got elected.

I would also like to take a moment to thank my predecessor, MLA Mitzi Dean, for her hard work during her time as the MLA from Esquimalt-Colwood, as well to thank her for her work as the Minister of Children and Family Development and as the Minister of State of Child Care.

As well, I want to take more of a personal approach to thank her for supporting military families across the province and across my community. During really challenging times during COVID, when our husbands, our partners, our families were at sea, making sure we were deployable and ready, she always was there to hear my concerns and from the people of our riding. Thank you for everything you've done.

To all my volunteers, to all the unsung heroes who stepped up and helped out, who didn't even know me, people who saw a common goal of making sure that British Columbians were supported: thank you for your countless hours of door-knocking, phone banking and — our favourite — fundraising. Thank you all for holding me up during this election.

We door-knocked on some rainy and windy days in Esquimalt-Colwood, and some sunny days. But you would have never known the challenges we faced at the door because at the end of the day, they would all come back with smiles and stories, good and bad, about how we were going to continue to make British Columbia an even better place than it already is to live.

To my sign crew, which, we can all attest to, is not an easy job, no matter what part of the province you're in: thank you for all the work you did during and after the election, when we all, let's be honest, wanted to sit in sweatpants and do nothing. You all went out and collected every single sign and made sure that we cleaned up well after. You were a very well-oiled machine. We had some good laughs and made lasting memories that I will never forget.

I was blessed to have people who told me at the doors about why I was the best person for the job, when some days, quite frankly, I even had some self-doubt.

I want to thank my family. I'm going to do this without

breaking down. I have baby 2 on the way, if no one's noticed around the House, our next little British Columbian.

I come from a family where my dad raised three very strong-willed daughters. He taught me to treat everyone equally. No matter where you come from or what you do, we always have something to teach each other, and you have to take it one day at a time. My dad, this Sunday coming, is celebrating 34 years of sobriety in a world that is not always the nicest place. He is a man that I look up to, as I stand in front of you today, who, due to health concerns, might not be here much longer. But I'm proud to say that I get to take every lesson I learned to this House, with you as my colleagues, to make sure that we are standing up for people.

As it was said in the throne speech, we may not always agree how to get there, but we agree we all need to do it together, even though the process may be rough, and there may be difficult conversations.

I have two sisters who are very different people than me, to say the least. I got phone calls and text messages daily, just checking in. How are you doing? How is it going? It's little things like that — again, because it's about time for each other — that really make it special.

To my in-laws…. To my mother-in-law, who is the mayor of small town in Newfoundland, it was so nice to hear from other people across the country who look to us in British Columbia and what we are doing, as always looking at how they can also better their communities by looking at us as a province that's doing good work.

To my little girl, to baby Evie, who people kept calling Eby for some reason during the campaign, in the news and everywhere. The running joke was…. I had a media event with the Premier, and they said: "Oh, I can't believe how well Eby behaved."

[1:10 p.m.]

The Premier said: "Oh, thank you. That's kind of weird." Then he realized: "No, no. They meant Evie, the baby." It became a running joke in my house.

It is a privilege to be the mom of a little girl and a second little girl on the way. I'm going to bring back a few reasons why.

It's astonishing that I get to be one of 93 people across the province who get to speak here today. I get to represent the people of Colwood, and I am proud to have such a diverse caucus. We have the most women elected ever in a caucus in British Columbia. Currently, 65 percent of our caucus is women.

I am also honoured to be elected to B.C.'s biggest group of women ever elected in B.C. history, as I look across the floor. Thank you to the women who came before us, who made it possible, who supported us to get where we are today. That was not an easy fight, always.

Let's just talk briefly about why I started this journey. I moved to British Columbia because I wanted a better place to live. I grew up in a very small town in Nova Scotia, and my running joke is that I can't go any farther and stay in the country. But why would I? This is a beautiful place to live, and I'm privileged to live on this island and in this province.

I worked in health care for 18 years, all in mental health and substance use. I've seen firsthand what good work from government can do. I started at a time when we had cut services, constantly, to addiction services. We had to beg and plead to government at the time, in 2007, to make sure we had services for people.

I have seen firsthand how supporting workers who have addiction can better our communities because, again, I have a dad who has an addiction. He had an employer who worked for him, who supported him through his process so that he could work for 35 years at a job that put food on our plates and lights on over our heads.

I had a mother who suffered from mental health issues, when there was no support in eastern Canada. To go see a psychiatrist, to have any type of help, you would literally have to drive four hours, and my dad did that. He'd work 12-hour shifts, come home, check in on the kids, drive four hours, see my mom and come back. I remember saying: "This is fundamentally wrong. This is not okay." If anyone's been to Nova Scotia, it's not very big compared to British Columbia, so it shouldn't have taken that long.

Then I got into activism in my union because I had a client who passed away, and I was told that if I wanted to take any time or if I wanted to do anything, I could take an unpaid leave to go take care of my mental health. My colleagues were told the same. I said, "This is wrong," so I got involved.

Then I met John Horgan, and I remember hearing him say that we need to bring everyone along in our journey. I remember saying: "Until we're there, he's right. We all have to bring along." We're all going to have different views, different opinions, but that approach to how we're going to get there is how we get there.

Being a labour activist, I was very lucky to be there at a time when I had strong-willed women to support me in my activism.

As part of my journey, I'm also honoured to be the B.C. military liaison for the province of British Columbia. I do that because I'm a Navy wife. I'm a family member of many serving members and now veterans.

In the name of my riding, we have Esquimalt: CFB Esquimalt, Maritime Forces Pacific and Joint Task Force Pacific. This base was established and has been operational since 1860 to the current day. So to say we have a long-standing, proud history with the military in my riding would be an understatement. It currently has over 4,000 military personnel and over 2,500 civilian employees.

Currently we have three ships out. HMCS Ottawa is overseas in South Asia, ensuring freedom of navigation with our allies. HMCS Regina is conducting training exercises with our allies off Hawaii. Some exciting news is that

we have HMCS Corner Brook, our submarine, conducting trials off Esquimalt in order to be deployed at a later date, the first time it has been in the water and operational since 2011. It's pretty exciting in a time when we all need to be standing and supporting each other coast to coast.

Nanaimo is also sailing, because I'll touch base on those folks, about local support of naval training requirements.

I want to thank everyone who's gone and the work they are doing, but also their family at home in my community. During COVID, my husband sailed literally around this Island. I have jokes about how I have pictures of me doing this while his boat was behind me and we were on the phone, because he stayed deployable ready.

[1:15 p.m.]

There were children who looked out and saw their parents, but it was months before we got to see them. Thank the families for holding down everything at home.

I just want to touch on our veterans to make sure they're also not forgotten because of all the work they did during their time supporting us in a country and the important work that they do. For most veterans I know, as people can probably attest, their work's not done. They're still doing good work in their communities.

I'll talk a little about my riding and some of the good work that we touched on in the throne speech as well. In Colwood, we had a joint collaboration with the Minister of Health and one of our local governments. They are now running a municipally run medical clinic in conjunction with the Minister of Health. It's a great example of what we show. We recognize there's something that needs to be done, and we can work collaboratively to give back in our community.

When Mayor Kobayashi made the announcement about this project, it was so big in the media that he had calls not just across our region and the province but from across the country: "How did you guys make this work?" He made it work by working with the Minister of Health at the time to ensure that the people in his community are going to get the primary care they need.

It said in the throne speech that a strong and growing economy is necessary to protect and improve the public services that families rely on, especially health care. There is no greater expression of who we are as Canadians than our universal, public health care. In a time when we are being challenged by someone we called an ally, this is a great example of the work we all need to do.

I was asked by a man at the door, during the election, about how a health care worker could run for the NDP with the current state of our health care. Well, let me tell you.

I have seen what investing in good services can do. We had some debate and talks in the House today about this. I have seen how we need multiple different approaches to support people in addiction and recovery. There is no one person with the same story, with the same problem. Therefore, why would their treatment be the same? We need to continue to make sure we are investing in all levels of recovery and support to support those people.

I just want to talk a little bit about Sean, who unfortunately did pass due to other related health complications. Sean was someone who was started on opiate replacement. He got hurt on the job, not an uncommon story from when I spent ten years at a detox, and he wanted to get back to work. How was he going to do that? They were doing different ways. He went down a really unfortunate path. Opiate replacement therapy made it possible for him to get back into trades, working with his union, working with his doctor, making his pain manageable through opiate replacement therapy.

I bring that story forward because it's a good example of some of the work this government has done around opiate replacement therapy and what we need to do and continue to do, as well as ensuring that we have abstinence-based programming, like we've done.

For anyone who doesn't know, in Victoria, we opened a women's treatment centre, the first in the South Island for women of the Island, under this government. Before, those women would have to go to the Lower Mainland for treatment, come back to our community and then hope to stay sober. Now they get to be there in our community.

We've also trained hundreds of doctors. We've hired over 6,000 nurses, just in the last year. We're taking action to retain them with better pay and working conditions. We are hiring and training people in health care, skilled trades, housing construction, mining and so much more.

I can tell you, as a health care worker, that when you go to work every day during a pandemic and you don't know where the next day is going to lead, having a government that actually cares makes a difference for those workers.

Some of the other good things that we talked about in the throne speech around health, and things we've continued. The scope of practice for pharmacists is expanding. People are getting prescription drugs for minor ailments and free contraceptives quicker and easier. And, the announcement of IVF treatment for people who want to start families. You can't talk about contraception without talking about IVF and the full spectrum of that care.

As someone who had to rely on fertility treatment to start my family originally, the proud work that this government did to look for families…. Because it's also a cost of living. For anyone who unfortunately has had to go through fertility treatment, it's quite expensive, and deciding if you're going to try to save for a home or start your family is a tough conversation to have. Now you don't necessarily have to do that. You can go and start your process and start your family.

As someone who's been through the process, it's already really hard. It's mentally and emotionally a rollercoaster.

So taking that bit away from everybody who wants to start a family makes a difference for British Columbians.

[1:20 p.m.]

Government and people in the field of maternity care also work together. It was called the unattached clinic. Everyone got wise enough to know that's a horrendous name, and they changed it to the perinatal clinic of Victoria General.

Again, the government recognized there was a hole. There's a hole in our maternity care system, and we need to fix it. Government, working with people in that field, said: "Well, let's look at this model and give it a try."

I was one of the first people. There was a group of us who went. Every time I went to the clinic at Vic General, it was such a compassionate, caring group of people. They would talk about how this is saving the health, keeping people out of emerg, keeping all of the good things going for people in maternity care who are already petrified. The assumption had been: "Well, you're 37; you know what you're doing." Nope, sure didn't.

Having people who could talk about the importance to me and support me and my growing family during a time that was really scary…. It went back to the collaboration part, to supporting people in our community. When I went there, it was people from all spectrums of life — new immigrants, people who have English as a second language. They were stepping up and making sure, in that group that was supported by this government, to fill that hole, that they were heard and they were supported.

A little on housing. I had the privilege of being elected to Esquimalt council before I started this journey. Neither was really planned, for the record. During my time in local government, we made some good progress in housing.

This government made it easier for us to support people who wanted to, maybe, look at different housing options on their land in our community. How could they support their kids with homes in our community? Aging in place is a very big one in my community, as we have a growing population.

Our government is cutting red tape, to build more housing in our communities. Getting to see it firsthand, when I was in local government but then door-knocking during this election, was something extra-special. I'd hear those stories.

One of the other housing sites that is now built in our community is the Lions at Fleming. It's a six-storey, 137-unit affordable rental. It's a mix of studios, one-bedroom, two-bedroom and family, three or four bedrooms. Several of its units are fully wheelchair-accessible, which is really hard to find for people who are struggling with affordability.

It was a joint project, with not only the government but other community agencies. It's another example of how, when we all work together collaboratively, we can show the good work we can do for the people in our community.

I had the privilege of doing a tour just after I was first elected — the family housing was already half-full — and hearing about the affordability aspect, what people were talking about and how it has changed their life. It shows what we've done.

Next is child care. I need it again, obviously. I myself struggled to find child care. Then we looked at the affordability, we looked at everything this government has done, and I found a spot.

As I've gotten to meet and know those other parents, I hear about the difference it has made for their lives. One couple told me they were paying $3,000 a month for in-home child care. That's what they needed at the time because they couldn't find a place, let alone somewhere that was affordable. They now are paying a much lower rate under our child care plan, and now they can have a breather. We just need to remember that things like that are changing lives for families in British Columbia.

The minimum-wage increase. For anyone who has followed me around, I can remember starting on the pay-for-15 campaign back in the day and how we had to raise the minimum wage. B.C. is among…. With the minimum-wage increases, now B.C. is the highest in Canada for the minimum wage. We're ensuring future increases so people will keep pace with inflation, because it's important for people.

Paid sick days. This was a huge win; this was great work. As someone who, during the pandemic, had to deal with employees…. Everyone said: "You're in a union shop. It's great. You get sick days." I said: "Well, let me tell you about how casual workers don't."

The government listened. They made sure people don't have to go to work sick. This was great work. I commend everything about it. We implemented a standard of five days of paid sick leave for every year.

Some of the things we talked about too are hiring and training more people in multiple areas. I saw this in health care.

[1:25 p.m.]

I often think of my cleaner who cleaned at our facility. Her name is Mulu; she's amazing. She was part of the group that got contracted out in the early 2000s and that this government brought back into health care. In her country, she was a nurse. She is now cleaning because her standards were not recognized. But under this government, what she's doing…. She's now getting re-educated and supported to get back into her field in an environment she's already working in as part of an interdisciplinary team, and that's great.

I am proud to be the Parliamentary Secretary for Labour as part of the work that I'm going to get to do to ensure that we're having good-paying jobs that continue to build a very strong community.

We've done things, and we'll continue. We've added the cancer presumption for firefighters. We've added numer-

ous cancers, a list of presumptive diseases, that firefighters are at risk of developing, so they can access workers compensation and the health care they need more quickly.

We've established a mental health presumption for police, firefighters, paramedics, sheriffs and corrections officers, as well as for nurses, emergency dispatchers, publicly funded health care aides and several other health and safety social service providers, in recognition of the increased risk of mental illness that can arise for workers from traumatic workplace incidents. This was a big win.

I can't count the number of times over my career where I have been involved in an incident, because it's a tough field to work in, and people are struggling. They're decompensating, and I can list all the reasons why they are. I think of how this will make the lives of my colleagues who are still working in health care better.

We've created 250,000 jobs in the past seven years, with the strongest hourly-wage growth in this country. I am proud to say, as a worker of this province who has now been elected into government, the work that we've done for workers….

The other thing I want to talk briefly about is domestic sexual violence leave. This was also a great win and great work by this government, and it will continue to, again, support our workers. You can now have up to five days per year of paid leave, and additional unpaid leave, available for employees who are facing domestic or sexual violence or parents of a child impacted by this kind of violence.

When I was a steward, I was in a meeting. It didn't look great. This employee, for whatever reason, was missing work constantly. They disclosed that they were being abused at home. This language allowed them to get out of their home. They didn't have to worry about financial obligation. They could get out. They are now safe with their kids. Sitting there and being part of it…. I can't even describe how good it felt to be like: "That's why I ran. That's why I'm here."

We've seen how unpredictable President Trump is. B.C. must be, and is, ready to defend against Trump's unjustified tariff. We are saying, with one united voice, that we will never be the 51st state — not now, not ever.

I am proud to say I'm Canadian. I'm proud to say I was born in eastern Canada. And I'm sure as heck proud to say I'm a British Columbian today, because this is the province I want to be in when this all goes down.

I can't even talk about the support I've gotten in our community from our military, who are just like: "This is not okay. I have fought for this country. I've stood for this country. People have lost their lives for this country, and this is how we're being treated by an ally."

There's a lot of work to do to lighten the load for British Columbians, and I recognize that. British Columbians have asked us to work together to make life better for them. I saw firsthand, as a health care worker during COVID, that during times of crisis and uncertainty, governments across party lines, across political views, can work together to better not just Canada but the lives of British Columbians. I've seen it, and it was good.

I thank the people who did it. I know those were challenging times and conversations, and I know people had to challenge their core beliefs, but they came together and said: "We're making sure that we're here and that we're represented." From being one health care worker to, now, someone who has the privilege of being here, I thank each and every person who did it, because every day was a hard day.

I can tell you the reason I ran for local government. There are two streets in Esquimalt…. If you ever get the chance — I know we're not far — and you have some free time, pop over to Esquimalt. It's great. Other parts are great too — they're listening in my riding — but in Esquimalt, I think about Lampson, and I think about Fraser still.

When the world first started to go sideways, there was a house that had this tree, and they had little hearts that the kids had sewn, and they put them on this tree.

[1:30 p.m.]

I was very fearful. I didn't know what was going on with COVID. I didn't want to get anyone sick. My husband was at sea, so I'd walk my dog by myself at night. That was the first house I remember seeing where they cared enough that they just wanted us to know that they were there for us.

Then, on Fraser, there was this little sign that's still there to this day to say we need to support each other. I remember that sign, and I think about it today when I feel like the world is on fire some days. I rock my little girl to bed and just think how we all need to do better together. And I think what I take away from the throne speech is that we're all in this. Again, how we get there will be different, but we all agree we need to get there.

During the difficult times we're facing, and these difficult conversations again, I hope we can all agree to do the same. A statement that's really important to me is "United we stand, and divided we fall." In a time where they're trying to cause division between us, there is never a more important time that we need to stand up together and say: "Enough is enough, and we will not be the 51st state."

Thank you to my colleagues today for hearing me, and thank you for your time.

Jeremy Valeriote: Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to the Speech from the Throne.

Before I begin, I want to thank the lək̓ʷəŋən traditional singers and dancers, Esquimalt Elder Mary Ann Thomas and Songhees Elder Frank George for opening this 43rd parliament in a good way with power and heart.

This Legislature sits on the territory of the lək̓ʷəŋən-speaking peoples, now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations. I'm grateful for their continued cooperation as we work to reconcile the wrongs of the past.

I also want to recognize that the people of West Vancouver–Sea to Sky live, play and work on the territory of the Sḵwx̱ wú7mesh and the southern Stl'alt'imx Nations, which include the Líl̓wat, the Xa'xtsa, the Skatin, the Samahquam and the N'Quatqua.

I also note that my hometown of Whistler is on the shared territory of the two nations, known in their languages as Sḵwx̱ wú7mesh Úxwumixw and Líl̓wat7úl.

I hold up my hands to the Legislature staff, from the cleaners to the Clerks, for helping me and everyone else in this building prepare for the start of session and our collective wish for four years of good work ahead.

I want to thank the constituents of West Vancouver–Sea to Sky for empowering me to do this work. They've entrusted me to represent our diverse communities, and I really feel that weight.

I will strive every day to honour you, the constituents, from the Stl'alt'imx and Sḵwx̱ wú7mesh people to the pioneers in Pemberton, the adventure-seekers in Whistler, the innovators of Squamish, the free spirits on Bowen Island and the pillars of West Vancouver society.

This is a big moment. I'm not sure what the nerves are about. It's not my first time rising to speak in this chamber. Maybe it's my first time being asked to hold forth for two hours — well, actually, 28 minutes. I thought I had…. I was never going to use the two hours, so that's probably about right. Hopefully I'm not stumbling too much.

It's also a big moment for our province and our leaders. As leaders, we can't afford to stumble.

As we've noted several times already, we're living in a period of global upheaval. With that comes a once-in-a-generation opportunity for transformative change, to change in a way that anticipates the future and makes life better for everyone. As leaders, we can't lean on mental models and systems that no longer serve us.

I started watching the Tragically Hip documentary and was reminded of the words of the great Canadian songwriter Gordon Downie, who has probably been quoted in this chamber before: "You can't be fond of living in the past, because if you are, there's no way you're going to last." That's probably true of all of us, but maybe…. I won't expand. Leave the poetry as it is.

I've been really lucky to have a lot of rich life experiences on my journey into this chamber. All of them, I hope, will inform my work here.

I have worked as a geological engineer, as an environmental professional. I've worked in the mining, energy, development, contaminated sites and local government sectors. I've been on both sides of the environmental assessment process, working for small businesses; working for deep-pocketed, influential proponents; and volunteering for community non-profits, reviewing very complex EA reports in the thousands of pages.

I've worked in mine closure and reclamation, geological exploration in the north of B.C. and environmental baseline mapping. I even did a season of tree planting in my youth. All driven by a desire to work in the great outdoors, not behind a desk. As we all know, those dreams fade with age. Now I'm behind a desk, behind this desk.

[1:35 p.m.]

Even though I didn't come to B.C. until I was 18, I've been blessed to get to see so many parts of this province and truly fall in love with our land and its people.

I've worked as local government staff and an elected official, so I've been lucky to have the opportunity to see multiple angles of the equation, bridging some gaps and facilitating understanding on all sides.

I also am extremely privileged. I'm white, male, etc., and I'm born at the right time to own a house and be financially comfortable. These bring their own sets of biases. When I think about the breadth of perspectives that I cover, it feels like a lot for one lifetime so far, but it's actually quite narrow.

If there's one key insight that comes from my life experience to date, maybe it's that under a different set of entirely possible conditions…. But for the grace of God, I could have been unhoused, suffering from addiction, disabled, disenfranchised. Or compelled by the need to support my family, I could've been pushed into working for a corporate interest that wasn't aligned with my values.

It's true that some of these things are choices, but it's important to remember that many are the product of circumstance and beyond our control. I'll say again that I feel extremely lucky to be standing here.

Because he's in the building, I do want to thank the mayor of Gibsons, Silas White, for setting me on this journey. It was his idea to start this crazy enterprise, and he helped me follow through on the first part of it.

I really want to lovingly thank my parents who might be watching, Mary and Gene. They created the conditions that allowed me to be here. It's really important that I recognize and thank my spouse, Ginny. She's been there through very difficult times, including our young daughter's severe illness and, thankfully, recovery a few years ago. She truly keeps the train on the tracks, and part of that….

I want to say hi to my twin 11-year-old daughters, who literally light up my life every day and whom I'm starting to miss quite a bit, by the way. This is only week 1.

Speaking of my upbringing, it might be my Yorkshire English or Calabrese Italian heritage, but I've always been a little skeptical of tradition for tradition's sake, so it's important to me that I fill this new role in an unconventional way, not all the time but sometimes.

I'm not like many people who maybe found their way here. I'm not a great disrupter activist or anti-establishment agitator. I absolutely respect that some traditions are long-standing because they're well-thought-out, they incorporate history and experience, and they work reliably most of the time. But I do feel like it's my duty to examine

and expand my own patterned established mental models, shine light on methods and traditions that are no longer working and incorporate different ways of seeing into my work.

I won't rush, and I won't overdo it just to get attention, but I will be stubborn in trying to keep my mind open for the duration of my time in this building.

Other traditions of this chamber may need updating as well. I was a page in the Ontario Legislature when I was 12 years old, and I recall a serious, partisan but safe environment. A lot has changed since the 1980s.

When I first visited the gallery of this chamber in 2018 as a guest of former MLA Nick Simons, I remember having a visceral reaction, dismayed at the culture of question period. I remember thinking at the time that I would not want my children to witness it. I thought that this behaviour would not be acceptable in my children's classroom, so why should it be okay for adults?

I really felt for the school groups in attendance that day, the example being laid out for them to see. I will say regretfully that there was equally poor behaviour from some representatives of all three parties in the House at that time.

These are some of the experiences and observations I bring with me as a new MLA. I'll take these first few weeks and months to observe, learn and ask questions before making any rash decisions.

I'll always centre my actions in two-way communication with communities of West Vancouver–Sea to Sky and other communities across this great province. My long-term goal is to avoid complacency. If I'm no longer doing this job with all my heart and soul, then I should definitely pass it off to someone else to carry on. British Columbians should expect no less from their representatives.

Zooming out, it's not easy being a British Columbian these days. Climate change, growing inequality, international politics, and the rising cost of everyday essentials are all making life less certain and causing anxiety, fear and concern. But as we've learned, British Columbians are born tough, and we've never shied away from adversity.

When wildfire threatens, we open our homes to evacuees. When a neighbour goes missing, entire communities help with the search. We work late at the hospital, even when our shift is over.

[1:40 p.m.]

We run a meal train for new parents or families facing an emergency or tending to the sick and injured. We still pull over if we see someone struggling to change a flat tire. We're a province of problem-solvers and adventure-seekers. We don't suffer at the hands of natural disasters or foreign powers; we make our own future.

We can make a future that's better than where we are now. We've borrowed heavily from future generations, and the debt is coming due. That may be provocative, when for the first time in nearly 100 years, we're not sure that tomorrow will be better than today. Life expectancy is shortening, our democratic foundations are shaken and there are some dark clouds on the horizon. But I have hope, and I believe we can make a future that's better than we are now. We have to look to the horizon and create a more stable, balanced, prosperous province.

We can't escape the reality. We have been borrowing from future generations, and it's time to repay the debt. We've borrowed forests to make massive profits, many of which have flowed offshore, never to be seen again by British Columbians. We've borrowed farmland to build warehouses and factories and subdivisions. We've borrowed fossil fuels when we needed to transition and save those fuels for their highest and best use.

We have the expertise, the knowledge and a deep-seated evolutionary understanding that we need to live differently and secure a better future. We can stabilize our changing climate and build more resilient infrastructure to withstand the storms ahead. We can mend the frays in our social safety net and not just reduce poverty but eliminate it entirely. We can continue to strengthen our relationship with the First Peoples of this province, because it's the right thing to do and because it will make us all stronger and better.

How do we do it? Certainly not by repeating past mistakes or through nostalgic narratives, as powerful and compelling as they might be, about the good old days. The good old days were not always good for a whole lot of people, and we can do better.

I also believe we can do better without stoking fear, guilt or shame. Change is unsettling, and it's scary sometimes. This isn't about imposing rules that force people to be green. It's about offering people better options, increasing opportunities for sustainable, long-term prosperity.

It's our job as legislators, leaders in our communities, to lead by example, set the tone, send the right signals and tip the scales towards hope. With leaders breaking trails to a clean, equitable future, we can inspire British Columbians to be participants in a new way of being on this planet.

There is evidence to support this thinking. Social change is contagious. In colloquial terms, we'd call it keeping up with the Joneses. If the Joneses have solar panels on their roof or a heat pump on the side of their house, neighbours are more likely to get on board, especially when it saves them money.

Behavioural scientists understand that just knowing what's healthy or environmentally friendly isn't usually enough to change behaviour. Humans are social and like to fit in, at least some of the time. If it's normal to compost our food waste, to bike or bus to work, to replace old windows, more people are likely to do it. Normal meaning we normalize these things, and they become everyday.

Former Obama White House adviser Molly Kawahata spoke in Whistler a few weeks ago, sponsored by Vail Resorts, which has a fairly strong, epic promise for environ-

mental sustainability. Molly pointed out that climate anxiety not only negatively impacts our psychological well-being, but it can also paralyze people who want to take action and don't know where to start.

In this building, we can offer hope. We can build affordable housing, community health centres, transit systems, clean energy, value-added forest products and the food and water security that make it easier for British Columbians to choose the right path.

I'm going to take that back. It's not a right path or a wrong path. It's just the path that we've agreed upon as a society and as a group of legislators.

We can build a B.C. that works for everyone, not just the wealthy or well-connected, and step up for the people who have been struggling the most and don't have the voice. We can offer real, practical solutions that people feel in their daily lives — solutions that don't just help today but set us up for a stronger, fairer and more sustainable future.

We don't actually have to sacrifice anything to make it happen. We can have both, or we can have it all. We don't have to choose between sustainability and prosperity. We can have both. We don't have to choose between climate action and a strong economy. We can have both. We don't have to choose between equity and wealth. We can have both of those.

[1:45 p.m.]

Inside this building, political theatre can amplify divisions as we strive for political differentiation in a busy information world. We can make it seem like British Columbians are more polarized than ever, but I believe we have more in common than ever before — facing, as we know now, several common threats.

We all want the lights to turn on when we hit the switch. If it's solar, wind, geothermal or tidal generators that are powering that switch at a lower cost, we can make our daily life more comfortable while also reducing our reliance on, let's face it, boom-and-bust fossil fuels.

We all want to be able to travel to places we need to go quickly, comfortably and affordably. Evidence shows that transit — abundant, reliable, frequent transit — would meet that need much better than cutting gas taxes and building and widening roads, and it's a wise investment of public money.

We all want to have money left over after we pay the rent or the mortgage. We won't get there by consolidating wealth at the top, and we won't get there by investing in sunset industries that enslave us to volatile international markets. We can make that future by growing our knowledge economy, clean tech, responsible tourism and creating a robust resilient basket of social services.

We all want accessible and high-quality health care, housing and education. We all want healthy communities that feel safe. We may disagree about the best way to get there, but when we remember that we're working towards a shared goal, the work gets easier.

Finally, we're all unsettled by the prospect of trade conflict, and we want our economy to be more diversified and more resilient.

I want to talk about the spirit of collaboration that is the foundation of the cooperation and responsible government accord, the Third Party caucus's agreement-in-principle with this government, CARGA for short.

In a time where global and local forces are pulling our province apart, the accord finds common ground. It recognizes that the future of British Columbia is more important than scoring political points. Our accord provides at least one year of stability, to be renewed annually. It allows government to deliver for British Columbians instead of fending off confidence votes and the spectre of another divisive election.

The accord provides essential investments that bring us closer to that hopeful future. There's money for community health centres, which will lift the burden from primary care providers and connect more people to family doctors. We'll improve access to mental health by covering psychologist visits under MSP.

We're focused on providing secure housing to our province's most vulnerable people, with 30,000 non-market housing units over the next four years and expanding of renters protection via SAFER and RAP, the rental assistance program.

We will build stronger communities, with reduced crime and public drug use, by expanding Duncan's Village model, where health care, addictions, treatment, housing and employment are made available to the most vulnerable members of our communities.

We will, at long last, bring regional transit to the Sea to Sky corridor — hallelujah — and Vancouver Island Highway 1 and improved service on Highway 16. It's not just great for the climate, traffic congestion and road safety but great for people. Reliable transit makes life more affordable, directly reduces cost of living, makes health care more accessible, allows people to participate in the workforce and keeps people safe.

Our accord includes a review of CleanBC, a roadmap to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, mitigate their climate-changing impacts and build an economy for the post-carbon age.

It will close a property transfer tax loophole, end spousal clawbacks on disability payments and fund more electric heat pumps to reduce methane gas consumption.

We'll be working closely with the paaʔčiidʔatx̣ to create a permanent plan for the Fairy Creek watershed, where Indigenous sovereignty and long-term environmental protections work in harmony.

We're striking an all-party committee on increasing democratic engagement, including electoral reform, to increase government transparency and accountability for generations to come. Democracy is the cornerstone to a functioning, healthy society. If people don't trust the

process, don't feel engaged enough to vote or feel cynical about the results, the whole structure creaks and groans, leaving people feeling even more insecure.

Our work as Green caucus will be making sure all the items listed above get done in 2025.

The CARGA accord also includes a strong "agree to disagree" clause. I think that's important for all of us to have in this building, because the B.C. Greens and the B.C. NDP remain separate and independent and because diversity does make us stronger.

In that spirit, I want to focus a few final moments on Tuesday's Speech from the Throne. We heard soaring rhetorical language and wartime references meant to inspire us to unity and action.

[1:50 p.m.]

I have to say, where I hoped to see a future-focused plan of action, instead I heard a response leaning heavily on a conventional view of our economy, a reactive rather than strategic response to the weight of the moment.

We heard a great deal about the tariff threat, and then we heard about natural resource extraction for export. It was much later in the address when we heard the postscript "beyond natural resources," where film production, trade missions and interprovincial cooperation were mentioned, seemingly as an afterthought or as a second priority.

I applaud the incorporation of Indigenous-partnered wind and clean energy projects into our power grid. I will say that a B.C. Hydro call for power is not new. What's more surprising is that it took this long, given we've been seeing electrification of the economy coming for at least a decade.

In the tariff response and in the election campaign, I keep hearing the same phrase, "laser focused." It's a good line, but in a time of overlapping crises, a narrow focus leaves too many people and too many problems behind. Now is not the time for a laser-focused approach. Now is the time for floodlights.

We can't tackle a single issue and leave all the others to fester in darkness. Let's bring affordability and poverty into the light, bring the climate crisis and need for biodiversity into the light. Health care, housing and Indigenous sovereignty: none of these things can be ignored in the government's effort to be laser focused on one issue.

We can't base our tariff response on fast-track resource development without further diversifying. Diversification is where the most work, the heaviest lift and the greatest reward are to be found.

Across this province, British Columbians are wincing every time they go to the grocery store, afraid of how much it will cost when they get to the till. They're cutting back at the pump, hoping the gas prices might drop before they hit empty.

They're putting off preventative or early warning measures like mammograms and colonoscopies because they don't have a family doctor.

They're seeing a startling number of people living on sidewalks and in cars, knowing full well that they're just one missed paycheque away from being the same, there but for the grace of God. The cost of simply staying alive has become a constant source of stress.

This government has shelved the grocery rebate and doubled down on LNG export, ignoring its terrible impacts on our climate and our health. Sometimes it acquiesces to lobbyists and big corporate interests and pushes regular British Columbians to the sidelines.

While we celebrate fast-tracking domestic clean energy projects, the magnitudes are important, and they tell a story. The energy equivalent that will stay in B.C. from clean wind energy is small compared to the amount of fracked methane gas that will be exported across the Pacific.

While hydroelectricity has an important part to play in B.C.'s future, the power from Site C, having cost British Columbians extravagantly, should go to British Columbian homes and businesses, not to mitigate emissions in one step of the LNG export process while we wash our hands of the upstream fugitive methane and downstream emissions when it's used for fuel in other countries.

British Columbians expect better because we're more than just workers or consumers. We're British Columbians. Our forests, rivers and coastlines aren't just resources. They're our identity.

I'm going to finish up. I know we can make the future better. That's why I wanted to be elected to this chamber. I can imagine a future where our communities are powered by affordable, renewable energy and everyone is connected to a community health centre. Where our young people stay because it's easy to find opportunities in sustainable industries and their dream of home ownership is attainable. Where our cities are prosperous and clean and our towns and villages cohesive, healthy communities, and both are the envy of the world.

My fellow members, let's get to work.

Macklin McCall: It is an immense honour to stand here in this House today and speak on behalf of the people of West Kelowna–Peachland. I consider it a great privilege to serve as their voice, and I do so with a deep sense of responsibility. The trust that the residents of this riding have placed in me is something I take very seriously, and it motivates me each and every day as I work on their behalf.

[1:55 p.m.]

I would like to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to the people who made this journey possible: the voters, the supporters, the dedicated volunteers, my campaign team and the riding association. Thank you.

Their tireless commitment has been nothing short of inspiring. As many of us know, the Okanagan summer heat can be intense. Temperatures often soar into the 40s. But despite that, my volunteers were still out there, knock-

ing on doors, engaging with the community and ensuring that the voices of West Kelowna–Peachland were heard. Their hard work and passion are what our democracy is built on. I am so grateful for every step they took to support me.

To my family, and especially to my wife, Megan, your unwavering support is the foundation of everything that I do. You have been my rock through every challenge and triumph, and I would not be here today without you. Your love and dedication inspire me to be the best representative I can be for our community.

I am also proud to serve as the official opposition critic for Emergency Management. This role comes with great responsibility, especially as British Columbia faces increasing severe threats from wildfires, floods and landslides. The events of recent years have underscored just how vulnerable our communities are to these disasters. Whether it's the wildfire season that seems to grow longer every year or the floods that devastate our infrastructure and threaten British Columbian lives, we must be prepared for anything.

The people of British Columbia deserve leadership that prioritizes safety and security. It is not just a matter of reacting to emergencies as they arise. It's about proactive, forward-thinking solutions to ensure that when disasters strike, our communities have the resources, coordination and resilience to recover quickly and effectively.

As I listened to the throne speech, I was reminded of the need for a bold, strategic approach to emergency management that reflects the true risks we face in our province. We cannot afford to be reactive. We must be prepared, and we must act with urgency and clarity to ensure that British Columbians are safe and supported when emergencies occur. This is not just a political issue. It is a matter of life and death. The protection of our communities, the safety of our families and the security of our future must be at the forefront of provincial priorities.

I am committed to ensuring that we do more than just talk about the need for better emergency management. I will continue to fight for the resources, strategies and leadership that will keep British Columbians safe in the face of increasing challenges.

I was born in Penticton, raised on a family farm in Okanagan Falls and went to a local high school in Oliver. For the past 15 years, I have called West Kelowna my home. Throughout my life, I've grown deeply connected to this province.

I've served on the front lines as an RCMP officer in B.C. and fought wildfires with the B.C. Wildfire Service. These experiences have given me an even greater appreciation for the land and the people of British Columbia.

But beyond the work, British Columbia is where I feel most at home. The rugged mountains, dense forests and pristine lakes shape our identity as much as they shape the land itself.

From hiking in Manning Park and Glacier National Park to running along the shores of Okanagan Lake in Peachland, I've spent countless hours in this province's beautiful outdoors. Camping across B.C. and exploring every region has shown me just how diverse and precious our landscapes are.

They're not just scenic backgrounds. They are at the core of who we are, and it is our responsibility to protect them, preserving this legacy for generations of British Columbians to come.

Wildfires, landslides and extreme weather events are no longer rare occurrences in British Columbia. They are a fact of life. Yet year after year, we see the same old story unfold — communities left vulnerable, first responders stretched thin and a provincial government scrambling to react instead of planning ahead. This is not just unacceptable. It's dangerous.

Take, for example, Highway 97, which serves as a vital lifeline for the Okanagan. The stretch between Peachland and Summerland remains dangerously unstable, with landslides routinely closing the road, putting families, businesses and emergency services at risk. This should not be the case for one of the most important routes in B.C.

[2:00 p.m.]

Similarly, Westside Road, another crucial road along Lake Okanagan, is outdated and unsafe. For years, this road has been neglected by the government. There have been little to no improvements in the last eight years. This windy, narrow road has blind corners, inadequate shoulders and a sheer drop into Lake Okanagan below. With no passing lanes for many kilometres and poor maintenance, especially in the winter, it is a constant hazard.

In fact, Westside Road has earned the dubious distinction of being voted the most unsafe road in British Columbia for several years in a row. This is not just a statistic. It is an everyday reality that my constituents are forced to endure.

Just a few weeks ago this road was put to the test after a bomb threat closed the bridge across Okanagan Lake. Traffic on Highway 97 was diverted to Westside Road, further highlighting how poorly equipped our region is when it comes to reliable infrastructure. Local residents had no choice but to rely on a road that has long been a safety concern.

Moreover, when a bomb threat closed the bridge, many drivers attempted to use the 201 forest service road as an emergency bypass route. While this may have been possible in the summer, the road is impassable during winter, when it is covered in snow and ice. Vehicles became stuck, and search and rescue teams had to be called in to assist motorists. This incident underscored how critically underdeveloped the infrastructure and emergency routes are in the Central Okanagan. This neglect has real-world consequences.

The Okanagan's emergency response systems are sim-

ply not up to the task. Search and rescue teams, who often assist fire, police and ambulance services, rely on gaming grant funding to continue their vital work. Yet despite record profits in the B.C. gaming industry, funding levels have stagnated and have not kept up with inflation. This puts volunteer emergency services at risk. The government must do more to support these critical services, which are a lifeline for many British Columbians in times of need.

West Kelowna is also in desperate need of infrastructure improvements. Our second hydro transmission line remains incomplete, leaving the city vulnerable to power outages during wildfires and storms. This is not just an inconvenience; it is a threat to public safety.

Even more pressing, West Kelowna, despite being the second-largest city in the Okanagan, still does not have its own hospital. Our population is growing rapidly, but health care services have not kept pace with the growth. Families should not be forced to travel long distances to receive the care they need. It is time for the government to recognize these urgent needs and invest in infrastructure that is critical to the safety and well-being of British Columbians.

We can no longer afford to neglect the infrastructure that supports our communities, nor can we allow emergency preparedness to fall by the wayside. The government must act now to ensure that B.C. roads, power systems and emergency services are resilient and prepared for the challenges ahead.

Life in British Columbia has become more expensive than ever before. Whether it's housing, groceries, fuel or utilities, the rising cost of living is making it harder for families to make ends meet. Across our province, hard-working British Columbians are struggling to balance their budgets, and far too many are being forced to make difficult decisions between basic necessities. This is a crisis that cannot continue to be ignored.

In my riding of West Kelowna–Peachland, we feel this pressure acutely. Families who have lived there for generations are finding it increasingly difficult to stay in the community they love. The cost of housing has skyrocketed, pushing the dream of home ownership out of the reach for many young families. Whether it's a first-time homebuyer looking for a modest property or a senior trying to downsize to something more affordable, too many people are left with limited options.

The cost-of-living crisis extends far beyond housing. The price of groceries has climbed steadily, leaving families to wonder how they will stretch their paycheques to cover basic needs.

[2:05 p.m.]

Gas prices are a constant strain on household budgets, especially in ridings like West Kelowna–Peachland, where many residents depend on their vehicles to get to work or run essential errands. For many, rising fuel costs combined with the carbon tax are becoming an unmanageable burden, limiting British Columbians' mobility and freedom.

This affordability problem isn't just making life difficult for those already here. It is driving young people out of British Columbia. Too many bright, hard-working young people are finding it impossible to start their lives in B.C. They are forced to leave their home province in search of other opportunities because they can no longer afford to live here.

For those who stay, the path to financial independence feels like an uphill battle. We cannot afford to lose our next generation of leaders, entrepreneurs and skilled workers to other provinces simply because British Columbia is no longer an affordable place to build a future. British Columbia should be a place where hard work is rewarded, where families can build a future and where communities can thrive.

This province has been the envy of the world for its natural beauty, its opportunities and its good quality of life. But that quality of life is being eroded as costs rise unchecked. We need to ensure that B.C. remains a place where families can afford to live, work and raise their children.

In my riding, this is more than a matter of economics. It's about the heart of our communities. West Kelowna–Peachland is home to families who have built lives here, but they are now being pushed to the brink. The cost of housing and living is making it difficult for young families to put down roots, for seniors to stay in their homes and for workers to afford the basics. Our communities are at risk of losing their vitality if these negative trends continue.

The solution lies in a comprehensive, conservative approach that puts our people first. We need to reduce government interference in the housing market and make it easier for families to find affordable homes. We must incentivize the construction of more affordable housing options while ensuring that the housing market is accessible to middle-class families, not just those with deep pockets. We need to cut the red tape that makes it harder to build, develop and grow our communities.

Additionally, we must address the issue of rising costs in B.C. across the board. That starts with reducing the tax burden on families and small businesses. We need to bring down the cost of living by lowering taxes and eliminating wasteful government spending. Every dollar taken from hard-working British Columbians is a dollar they could have spent on their families, their homes and their futures. Instead of taxing our way out of problems, we need a government that believes in the power of the people to make their own decisions in their best interests.

At the heart of this is a commitment to ensuring that British Columbia remains a place where families and communities can thrive. We need to foster an economy that supports workers, creates opportunities for young people

and allows businesses to flourish without being burdened by overregulation and sky-high taxes. The future of our province depends on it.

As the representative for West Kelowna–Peachland, I am committed to advocating for policies that prioritize affordability, reduce the cost of living and create real opportunities for all people to succeed. It is time we put the needs of families and communities at the centre of our provincial priorities, ensuring that British Columbia remains a place where hard work is rewarded and where everyone has the chance to build the life they deserve.

British Columbia is unlike any other province in Canada. Our distinct identity is uniquely shaped by the land we call home, the industries that sustain our families and the communities we hold dear.

From the rugged coastline to the majestic mountains, from our agricultural roots to our vibrant tech sector, British Columbia is a province defined by both its natural beauty and the hard-working people who make it thrive. Our future should reflect this richness, but it also needs to be protected and guided by the principles that have always built this great province: self-reliance, personal responsibility and community strength.

One of the most fundamental beliefs I hold as a member of the official opposition is that decisions about our future should be made here in British Columbia, not thousands of kilometres away in Ottawa.

[2:10 p.m.]

While the federal government plays an important role, the people of British Columbia know what is best for our province. We understand our challenges better than anyone else. We know that our needs are different and that solutions that work in other parts of Canada don't always apply here in B.C. Whether it's emergency preparedness, infrastructure or economic growth, we require tailored solutions that reflect the reality we face and the opportunities we have.

As the critic for emergency management, I am committed to ensuring that our province is equipped to handle the unique challenges we face. In British Columbia, we live in an environment where wildfires, floods and landslides are a part of life, but far too often, we see governments scrambling to react to crises instead of preparing for them. That is why, as a Conservative, I am advocating for a proactive approach to emergency management, one that prioritizes prevention, readiness and support for our first responders.

We must invest in the infrastructure that helps keep communities safe, whether it's upgrading roads, fortifying bridges or ensuring emergency services have the tools they need to respond swiftly and effectively.

In my riding of West Kelowna–Peachland, we know firsthand the toll inadequate infrastructure and emergency response can take. We've seen the devastation caused by wildfires, and we've felt the strain on our first responders who were asked to do more with less.

It's time for the government to take a proactive, long-term approach to building infrastructure that serves communities, not merely react to crises when they arrive. Whether it's fixing unstable roads, ensuring emergency routes are accessible in all conditions or bolstering search and rescue operations, we need a government that works to make British Columbia safer before the next disaster strikes.

This is also about creating the conditions for economic growth. B.C. is a province rich in resources, innovation and talent, yet we've seen time and time again how provincial policies can stifle the very industries that sustain us. A stronger future for B.C. means fostering a business environment that allows entrepreneurs to thrive, supports local businesses and creates jobs families can rely on.

B.C. Conservatives stand firm in our commitment to cut the red tape that burdens businesses, to reduce unnecessary taxes that stifle growth and to make sure that our natural resources industries like forestry, mining and energy continue to contribute to the prosperity of all British Columbians. We must protect our environment, but we must also protect the economy. These two goals are not mutually exclusive. They go hand in hand.

Moreover, we need a B.C. where the essential infrastructure of our communities, like hospitals and roads, are built to meet the needs of our growing population.

West Kelowna–Peachland is one of the fastest-growing regions in the province, but the infrastructure has not kept pace with the demand. Our second hydro transmission line remains incomplete, and despite being the second-largest city in the Okanagan, West Kelowna still lacks its own hospital. These are not just inconveniences; they are critical gaps in our ability to provide the necessary services to our people. As a member of the opposition and a dedicated advocate for my riding, I will continue to push for the infrastructure investments that are essential for B.C.'s future.

Every community, no matter how rural or urban, deserves the services and infrastructure that will allow it to grow and thrive. I believe in a future where British Columbians can live in communities that are safe, prosperous and supported by the right policies — a future where families are empowered to live the life they want, without being burdened by sky-high taxes and inefficient government, a future where our roads, hospitals and schools are built to meet the needs of today and tomorrow. This is the future I am working towards, and I am committed to ensuring that British Columbia remains the best place in Canada to call home.

Together we can build a province that is not only stronger but smarter in how we address the challenges of tomorrow. I am proud to be part of a conservative movement that champions the values of independence, hard work and community. I will continue to fight for a stronger, safer, freer and more prosperous British Columbia for all.

[2:15 p.m.]

British Columbia is my home. It always has been, and it always will be. From the Okanagan Valley, where I was born and raised, to the rugged mountains and peaceful lakes that define our province, every inch of this land is part of who I am.

British Columbia is not only a place to live; it is the heart and soul of our identity. It is the land that nurtures us, the communities that support us and the future we are building for our next generation. It is a privilege to stand before you in this chamber today representing the people of West Kelowna–Peachland and advocating for the future of this great province.

The challenges we face in British Columbia are real, but so are the opportunities. Together we can chart a course toward a future where British Columbia remains a beacon of opportunity, self-reliance and prosperity, a future where the people of B.C. — every family, every worker, every community — are given the tools and the freedoms to succeed.

As a proud member of the official opposition and the critic for Emergency Management, I am committed to working tirelessly for the people of this province. We must prioritize British Columbia first, whether it's ensuring our infrastructure is built to last, investing in our emergency preparedness or cutting the government's red tape that holds us back.

Our province is full of untapped potential. I believe that with the right leadership, B.C. can become the model for economic strength, personal freedom and greater autonomy. Let's work together to build a stronger, safer and more resilient British Columbia, one where the needs of our people come first, a province where families can live in peace, where businesses can thrive and where our natural beauty is preserved for generations to come.

It is time to put British Columbia back on a path to prosperity, to reclaim the values that have always defined us — hard work, freedom and responsibility — and to ensure that our province remains the best place in Canada to live, work and raise a family.

This is my commitment to you. I will continue to fight for the future of this province and its people, because B.C. is worth fighting for.

Deputy Speaker: Recognizing the Minister for Emergency Management and Climate Readiness.

Hon. Kelly Greene: Thank you, hon. Speaker. It's good to see you in the chair and to start off this new legislative session with the privilege of speaking to the throne speech.

I want to begin by recognizing that we are on the traditional territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən-speaking people, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.

Before I begin, I think it's really important to remember that being here is a team effort in every sense of the word. My election team was incredible. They were all in, every day, to elect a government that puts people first. I was honoured to be supported by volunteers in the hundreds, including some very brave souls who were out during the atmospheric river on the last two days of the campaign.

Many thanks, also, to my executives who are competent, compassionate and dedicated to building a B.C. that we can all be proud of.

My personal team is everything to me. Without their love and support, I couldn't be here. My husband, Trevor, has been my best friend, adventure partner and the love of my life since we met 23 or 24 years ago. Yes, we really can't agree on the dates, but it has been a source of humour for ten or 11 years.

More seriously, he carries an incredible load when I'm here or travelling around the province, working on issues that matter for people and communities. I am so grateful for his kindness, his sense of humour, his intelligence and, above all, love.

Our kids, Will, Tilly and Sully, miss their mommy a lot. We might text and talk, but it's not the same as being there in person. The kids have been taking turns with a bug this week, and I know that Trevor has it, but there is something that is an unmet need for mommy snuggles, both from me and for the kids.

I am so proud of my kids. They are growing into the people they are meant to be. They are empathetic, clever and strong. My husband and I are playing zone defence at our house. I'm not sure that we're coming out ahead, and that is a good thing.

Not every day runs the way you'd hoped it would go, and that's where I'm so grateful for the support of my folks, Peggy and John, whom we tag into the ring when we're worn out, double-booked or otherwise in a pickle. Our lives would be a whole lot messier without their help.

[2:20 p.m.]

It is the greatest honour to be elected to represent Richmond-Steveston. I have lived in Steveston nearly my entire life, and no place else in the world feels like home. Every day I find myself incredibly blessed to be in a community that is both in nature, at the mouth of the Fraser River, but also home to diverse communities since the very founding of Steveston village.

Today we have folks from many communities. We have Hong Kong and mainland Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, South Asian, Vietnamese, Latin American, Black and Indigenous people, and it really, truly feels like home. Sometimes I say it feels like the UN, but we all get along.

We have a history of diversity since the 1800s, and that's reflected in our heritage sites, like the Britannia Heritage Shipyard, where we celebrate First Nations — in particular, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm people — Japanese settlers, as well as Chinese and white settlers. Of interest to folks about the amount of diversity we have had in Richmond, at the time of internment, which is a dark stain on our province's and

country's history, one-third of the population was ethnically Japanese. I think we have a really proud history of welcoming people from around the world.

Our community in Richmond-Steveston is really economically diverse. A lot of people…. I say I'm from Steveston, and they say: "I love the fish and chips." But we're more than that. We are an incredibly diverse economy, and I'd like to take this moment to say: shop local. Support our local economies. Buy B.C. and Canada.

We have the largest commercial fishing craft port in Canada. We unload an incredible amount of seafood, the bounty of our province, all the time in Steveston. It's due to the incredible work of the Steveston Harbour Authority, making sure that the services are there to serve that industry, whether it's the ice plant, welding, fish processing, marine services or fishing-plastic recycling. They are an amazing one-stop shop to support our fishing industry.

We also have tourism, which I think people are pretty familiar with in Steveston. We have great heritage sites, but we also have our modern fishing industry, as well as an incredible array of restaurants for every taste and budget.

We also host a lot of film. When we're talking about diversifying our economy, I think that's really exemplified in my riding, where we have all these different industries coming together, complementing one another. Our film industry takes advantage of our heritage sites as well as our natural areas, like Garry Point Park, which was transformed into a rather haunted locale for a while, with temporary buildings.

I've mentioned our heritage sites, but they include the Gulf of Georgia Cannery, our Steveston Museum, Britannia Heritage Shipyard, the Japanese Fishermen's Benevolent Society building and more.

We also have medical and dental services. Some of our historic buildings have been lost, such as the Japanese hospital, which is part of our heritage in Canada. The nucleus, the kernel of our medical system, which doesn't have a barrier, regardless of your ability to pay, came from the Japanese hospital. I'm happy to share that history with anybody, any day, who's interested.

We also have a lot of goods and services. We've got great shops like Monkey Tree, Nikaido, Prickly Pear, Bellatudo, Steveson Coffee, Touch of Class Florists and the Richmond Hospital Healthcare Auxiliary Thrift Shop. There are too many to mention. It is an incredible village. I highly recommend people heading there.

We also have farming. We've got the whole range of industry, all the way from fishing through to farming. I think that when we're in this situation where we are now, in these really unprecedented times…. I don't like that word. It comes up too much, and I think people are feeling weary from everything that's coming at us here in British Columbia. But the threats to our sovereignty, the threats with the tariffs….

[2:25 p.m.]

Now is the time to be looking at places where they have this diversity of economy, supporting our local economy by buying local, shopping local, playing local, because our stronger economy means stronger communities.

I'd also like to say that Richmond-Steveston is not stagnant. It's moving. It's moving fast. We're a growing community. We were voted as Metro Vancouver's best neighbourhood. It's a great place to raise kids, and we also have a growing seniors population. No matter your age, it's a great place to be. Maybe not in your young 20s; there's not a lot of nightlife.

We have wonderful resources for the community: the Steveston Community Centre, the West Richmond Community Centre. These are run by volunteer societies that help determine the programming and run the events. Some are really well known, like West Fest or the Steveston Salmon Festival.

We also have places of worship, so many of them, of all different credos from around the world, as you would expect with such a diverse population. We've got Steveston Buddhist Temple, St. Joseph the Worker, South Arm United Church, Gilmore Park United Church, the Bayit, the Chabad, Beth Tikvah, St. Anne's Anglican Church, Lighthouse Church, Eastern Catholic Church, Richmond Chinese Alliance Church and Emmanuel Christian Community.

I think these are all part of that beautiful tapestry of culture and ethnicity that we have in our riding, and it is such an honour to be able to attend special events, cultural and religious celebrations, and to enjoy these special foods. We are constantly learning from one another, and we are finding joy in our diversity. Everybody is just so immensely proud to be part of the community and to be able to contribute to that wonderful tapestry.

It's no surprise that housing is incredibly important. Richmond is one of a handful of very expensive communities to live in, and our government has made a spectrum of investments into housing for people, from vulnerable people all the way through to middle-income families. I'm going to share some really great examples that are coming up, but the list is not exhaustive.

We have the Pathways Clubhouse development on No. 2 Road. It's going to provide homes for 80 people. For people who don't know what Pathways Clubhouse is, it supports people with mental illness and has all kinds of services, from peer support to employment training, to make sure that people are supported while on their journey to mental wellness.

This development is going to have a range of affordability for its units, all the way from shelter rates to affordable market rentals. This project received provincial support through B.C. Housing, in partnership with the city of Richmond. I'm excited that the project is going to be completed this year, and we'll be getting that online soon.

There is also a nine-acre B.C. Housing site at No. 2 and

Blundell that is in the process of being redeveloped, and 850 new units for individuals and families are going to be coming to this site. It's going to be phased construction, and it will include support for existing tenants. This is great news for folks who are finding affordability in Richmond a challenge.

There are also many other developments that have been built in Richmond to support vulnerable people, women, women with children, seniors and families. We have accomplished a lot, and I'm looking forward to delivering more for the people of Richmond and families in my community. Thankfully, our government is committed to delivering homes for people and pushing speculators out of our market.

Our government is committed to strengthening access to health care. In Richmond, we've seen important progress towards access to quality health care services in good-quality facilities. I've lived in Richmond long enough to remember the regular press releases that were sent out by the B.C. Liberal MLAs of the time, where they would promise a new hospital was on its way. Spoiler alert: it never came.

Our government promised and we delivered. We're building a new hospital tower that almost fully replaces all services for the hospital, and it meets all modern medical standards, unlike the 1950s tower that we've got today.

We've already completed phase 1 of the development project, and we are full steam ahead on future phases. It is going to be a nine-floor acute care tower with a new intensive care unit to replace the existing one, a new imaging department with four CT scanners and two MRIs, a pharmacy and short-stay pediatrics.

[2:30 p.m.]

As a parent, I know that families really appreciate having more options for the care of their little ones.

Pre- and post-surgical care spaces are increasing by 265 percent. We'll have a bigger ER, with 138 percent increase in spaces. We're going to have three additional operating rooms, and the number of beds is going to increase by 147 percent. We've already got an updated cancer care clinic at the hospital, and renovations are underway to support psychiatric patient needs.

We also know that people don't always need the hospital, but they could end up there because they don't have the right options in the community. That's why we opened two urgent and primary care centres for patients with acute needs who aren't having an emergency. I, myself, have appreciated their care when I needed stitches. I highly recommend…. Well, I don't recommend needing stitches, but I recommend the care there.

We also know that we need to help people with the cost of living. Parents know that the cost of child care just a decade ago was budget-busting. Parents, mostly mothers, dropped out of the workforce or chose to be underemployed due to the very high cost of child care. We have tackled this challenge head-on, bringing affordability for families and getting parents back into the workforce, which is a great economic plan.

Since 2017, in Richmond-Steveston alone, we have funded almost 2,000 new spaces, including hundreds of $10-a-day spaces, and affordability credits have meant just over $25 million back into parents' pockets. That's in Richmond-Steveston alone, and it's incredible to think of the impact of this program on a provincial scale.

It's pretty well known that I got my start advocating for education. I fought to keep schools open and seismically repaired — two things that were opposed by the B.C. Liberal government at the time, now called the Conservatives. But we've completed, under our government, so many seismic upgrades. We've kept schools open, and we're making sure that they're as safe as they can be for everybody inside.

I'm going to list out these schools because I am so excited that they are complete: Garden City Elementary, Hugh Boyd Secondary, McKinney Elementary, Whiteside Elementary, Steves Elementary, Maple Lane Elementary, Mitchell Elementary, Tait Elementary, Brighouse Elementary, Steveston Secondary, Tomsett Elementary, Ferris Elementary, Bridge Elementary and Cook Elementary.

There are tens of thousands of kids, teachers, staff and parents that are going to be safer in these schools for generations. This is incredibly important work, and I am so proud to say that there are additional schools under development. I am very much looking forward to announcing those in the future.

I am so honoured to be part of the team that forms this government, a government that is standing up for the people of British Columbia. As the Minister of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, I'm also honoured to be part of a team that's addressing the challenges we're all facing to keep people and communities prepared and safe.

As we see every day on the news, there is a lot going on, locally and globally, particularly with our neighbours to the south. We know that the threat of harmful tariffs from the United States is something a lot of people are worried about. Our government has a plan to protect British Columbians from the economic impacts of potential tariffs and secure a strong future for our province.

In the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness, we work every day to make sure that vital supply chains are maintained. This supports our communities in B.C. and across the country with transportation from the ports and B.C. industry to make sure that we are best positioned to diversify where we sell our products. This is part of our government's role in domestic resilience and international trade.

Our government is standing strong for Canada, standing strong for our farmers, who work tirelessly to protect our food security, who know more than anyone the increasing climate emergencies and what that means for our food security. We are standing strong for our tourism sec-

tor, like those in Steveston and elsewhere in the province that are bracing for the impacts of tariffs, of record heat, of devastating wildfires. We are standing strong for coastal Indigenous communities, who see how climate change is threatening their cultural and commercial fishing.

[2:35 p.m.]

In EMCR, we plan, and we prepare, and then we plan some more because our emergency management systems must ensure businesses, communities and families have access to the supply chains that meet their daily needs. And most importantly, our work is to keep people and communities safe through wildfires, drought, floods and other climate emergencies. We are working to meet those challenges head-on as a government and in my ministry.

The Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness is still a relatively new ministry. I am honoured to be its second minister, and I want to acknowledge the incredible work of my predecessor to build this ministry into what it is today. I know I have big shoes to fill and important work ahead, and I'm ready to meet the challenge.

This ministry was created in 2022, following some of the most difficult months in the province's history. In the summer of 2021, a series of wildfires destroyed the village of Lytton, displacing families and dispersing them across B.C. Tragically, two lives were lost.

Since then, the province has supported the village's recovery efforts by funding site remediation and re-establishing essential infrastructure and services. The province has committed nearly $59 million to recovery in the village. I know that this has been a long, challenging process, but I'm heartened to see people returning home and revitalizing their community.

In the months following the wildfires, B.C. endured the most significant weather event in recent history. In November of 2021, a series of atmospheric rivers, or heavy rainfall — we hadn't heard of atmospheric rivers before this — swept through a lot of the province, and we saw incredible damage to infrastructure that we count on. We saw major highways collapse. We saw extensive flooding in communities and farmlands. We saw mudslides and thousands of people displaced.

This disaster tragically claimed the lives of five people. My thoughts remain with the families and communities of those people, and with everybody affected by this unprecedented event.

It turned out to be the most expensive climate-fuelled disaster in the history of British Columbia, and it's had far-reaching impacts on people, on communities, the economy and critical infrastructure. We knew that there were lessons to be learned, and we knew that we could do better.

That's one of the reasons our government created the Ministry of Emergency Management and Climate Readiness. Over the past several years, we've taken significant steps to improve how we respond to emergencies and help people recover, how we mitigate and prepare for impacts of our changing climate. We know that climate change is accelerating and making these storms more frequent and with more severity.

Our government has committed approximately $225 million to support flood recovery and resiliency in Abbotsford and Sumas Prairie, and $71 million to support flood recovery in Merritt, as well as $18 million for Princeton. This has supported critical projects like upgrades to the Barrowtown pump station. That's going to make it more efficient and resilient to additional floods.

When times are tough, the province, in partnership with local communities and response agencies, is there to help keep people safe, get them back on their feet, and help rebuild.

As climate-related emergencies increase in frequency and severity, we can expect to see evacuations increase. Being evacuated from your home is an incredibly stressful experience, and our government has worked to support evacuees and make important changes to support them better.

During emergencies, emergency support services — that's ESS, for those who are familiar — is available to support evacuees who need assistance meeting their basic needs. They're things like food, lodging, incidentals and transportation.

We've made a lot of changes that would support access to ESS, including a new B.C. evacuee help line and self-service option, so evacuees don't have to visit a reception centre, something that we had heard was really important. Because being evacuated from your home is so stressful and an incredibly challenging time, I want British Columbians to know that we're there for them if the worst should happen.

I also want to take a moment to recognize all of the ESS volunteers and responders for their dedication in helping their neighbours and community members when disaster strikes. Thank you.

We have more support in British Columbia. I think of the people in British Columbia who have stood up and said: "I want to help people." One of those groups is our dedicated search and rescue team.

[2:40 p.m.]

I do want to thank that group of volunteers that assists people in their time of need, those search and rescue crews who are sent out into our beautiful province. While it is beautiful, it's also filled with difficult, mountainous terrain. Beautiful coastlines, but again, they can be very dangerous. We've got lakes and forests.

When things go wrong, we have dedicated individuals who are on our search and rescue teams that can assist us. Whether it's for ground searches, air or marine rescue, these amazing people are there for them in their time of need.

These volunteers are on call for 24 hours a day, 365 days

a year, and they generously provide their time and expertise to help people across British Columbia. The work of these search and rescue volunteers is invaluable, and I want to share my deepest appreciation for everything that they do in keeping people safe.

Aligned with our new emergency management legislation, we are updating the disaster financial assistance program, the DFA, to ensure the program meets the evolving needs of people and communities. Disaster financial assistance helps eligible people in communities recover from uninsurable losses following the aftermath of a large-scale disaster. For those sudden, unexpected, widespread situations that are not insurable, British Columbians can count on that disaster financial assistance to support them when insurance just was never an option.

Whether you rent or own, home insurance is one of the best ways that you can protect yourself and your family, and we encourage everyone in B.C. to have insurance. It's important that people update their homeowners or tenants insurance policies and understand their coverage for all risks. It can cover the costs of repairing your home and replacing your belongings, and it will typically cover accommodation and other living expenses if you're under an evacuation order.

When it comes to preparing for emergencies, everyone has a role to play. When an evacuation order is issued, people need to act urgently. The last thing they should have to worry about is what to pack, who to call or where to go. By doing that preparedness work beforehand, people can relieve so much of that pressure and stress on themselves and their family if they're ever in a situation where they need to evacuate. Now is an important time, before the hazard season where spring floods and summer wildfires may occur, to build a plan.

To help families prepare, the province launched the emergency ready planner, which is an easy-to-use, interactive tool that helps people build a personalized emergency plan. The emergency ready planner can be found online at preparedbc.ca/emergencyready.

The interactive planner will take people through the various sections of an emergency plan, including what to pack in an emergency kit and your grab-and-go bag. It includes important information such as contact information for people in the household, emergency meeting places, emergency insurance policy information and steps to create a FireSmart property that's more resistant to wildfire damage.

B.C. FireSmart provides great resources with information on changes you can make to protect your home from wildfire. There are tips on landscaping, fire-resistant trees and plants and other tips to help reduce risks to your home if a wildfire was to threaten your property.

PreparedBC also has hazard-specific guides, which is really important because not every community has the same hazards. For example, Richmond does not have the need for a tsunami hazard. We are, fortunately for us and unfortunately for the Island, protected from tsunamis. But the hazard-specific guides that are online include earthquake and tsunami, flood preparedness, heat preparedness, wildfire preparedness and other hazards.

I encourage people to take a look there so that you can have an idea on your emergency planning and find the resources that match the hazards in your community. I've heard time and again that people want to take a more active role in the face of threats to their home, their community, their businesses, whether it's wildfire, earthquakes, floods or other hazards. Being prepared makes you and your community safer.

I'd like to illustrate some of the things that our family has done to be personally prepared. Our Premier may not have known how prepared I was when I was asked to serve in this role.

[2:45 p.m.]

So our family…. From the age of 22 months old, I've taught the children how to call 911 and why you would call 911. You need to make those instructions very age-appropriate and tailored to your child. For example, I would let my 22-month-old know that if Mommy is lying down and you can't wake her up, that's 911, and how to do the call.

You also need to share with everybody in the household what to do in case of a house fire, because that's one of the most common hazards that people face. You need to know your meeting point. There are tragic circumstances where people go back into a building, thinking that their loved one is inside when they are actually safely outside, because they didn't have a meeting place.

You need to know what to do in case of blocked exits and to proactively have smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, a fire extinguisher, know where they are and how to use them.

You also need to know in our household, because we live in Richmond, what to do in case of an earthquake. You stop, you drop, and you hold on underneath, hopefully, very sturdy furniture. You also have to have prepared a grab-and-go, 72-hour kit — 72 hours or longer — and have an out-of-province family contact. Everybody might not be at home when disaster strikes. In case of an earthquake, where there could be widespread disruption, being able to contact somebody out of the province is an additional way that you can ensure that you can be reconnected with your loved ones when local services are overwhelmed.

You should also have a first-aid kit at your home and in your car and know how to use it. Your kids should know how to use it. I always highly recommend CPR and first aid.

Finally, and it's personal to me, you should have a life skill of swimming. You never know when that's going to save your life.

We're just about out of time, and I have so much more

to say. I am so proud of the work that this government has done. We are well on our way to doing more and delivering important resources for the people of British Columbia.

I know that our province and country are strong and beautiful, and we have been through tough times together. I know that we will prevail again because we are the true north, strong and free.

Misty Van Popta: Thank you, hon. Speaker, for the opportunity to address this House for the first time and to speak to the people in Langley and across the province of British Columbia for the first time as an MLA for Langley–Walnut Grove. My hope is that I will be succinct in my message. Given my passion for the topic, I will use much of this time to hammer home why I am here.

Now, I will get to that message shortly, but first, I would like to start by taking time to express my gratitude to my family and friends who supported me during the campaign. Some were a bit more reluctant to jump on the bandwagon. As we all know, the job of an elected official is all-consuming, and often the ones closest to us are the most affected by the burden we carry.

The campaign was a tough fight and one requiring hundreds of hours.

I would like to thank my predecessor today for her years of service. But mostly, I want to thank my incredible team of volunteers and staff, most of whom were strangers when I started this journey last summer but whom I now call friends.

We ran our campaign out of an old, vacant house, and today we stand in the people's House here in Victoria. What we lacked in resources, we made up for in determination. We had an army of young adults hungry for change in this province.

[2:50 p.m.]

Our campaign knocked on the door of every single-family home in my riding. I put my personal phone number out there and personally answered every call. That same dedication and commitment is what I intend to bring to this job every single day.

To my kids, who are in the midst of launching their own adult lives, I did this for you. I am fighting to bring affordability back to this province so that you are never driven away from your home in search of affordable living and can live the life of freedom and opportunity that this country and province have promised to us all.

To my parents, sitting at home, watching their daughter fight for accessible health care and services as you age in place, I do this for you.

To my sister, a health care worker throughout the pandemic who continues to serve the most vulnerable today, and at a great personal sacrifice, I do this for you.

And to my fiancé, thank you for your unending support of this crazy Canadian girl. Let's make 2025 the year we put the international border, which lies between us, behind us.

Most importantly, to my constituents, you already know that I'm a fighter, and I will work every day to keep finding ways to serve you to the best of my ability. I am immensely humbled and honoured by the trust you have placed in me as your MLA.

I'm mostly an optimist and try to always assume the best in people. As I look around this chamber, I truly believe that most of us are here for the right reasons. We are here for the province and those unable to fight for themselves, but we should mostly drive to serve our community.

This brings me back to why I am here. Langley, my hometown, sits mid–Fraser Valley, the last municipality in the Metro Vancouver regional district. The proverbial middle child tucked away between Surrey and Abbotsford, Langley has come into its own and is now a force to be reckoned with, both economically and in demographic growth.

I would suspect that many of you here are unaware of what is taking place south of the Fraser, but within the next few years, it will be the new urban centre of British Columbia. Recent statistics have Langley township at a population of over 155,000 people. We have grown a staggering 15 percent in the past five years, topping 2½ to 3½ percent growth, year over year.

When my parents bought their first home in 1970 in Langley, at the Smith Mobile Home Park, situated just off the 200th Street–Highway 1 interchange, it was for the same reasons that people are still migrating there: affordability and beauty. You see, Langley township is 75 percent ALR lands, full of farms of all kinds, and spans from the border to the Fraser River.

However, we are also known as a community of communities, with seven urban areas placed throughout the ALR — Aldergrove, Fort Langley, Walnut Grove, Willoughby, Murrayville, Willowbrook, Brookswood, Fern Ridge — each with its own distinct character and needs.

I've lived in Langley my whole life, and already, with my first few trips to Victoria to get set up underneath my belt, I tend to get homesick. This is why I suspect that at the end of this 43rd parliamentary session, you will all be sick of hearing about Langley, if not experts in it.

They say the squeaky wheel gets the grease, but my goal here is to be just a little bit louder than a squeak. You see, for far too long, Langley township has been overlooked by all levels of government, across all party lines, thinking of us as some small town, while missing out on the fact that we've become one of the fastest-growing municipalities in the province.

Langley township is served by three provincial highways: Highway 1, Highway 10 and Highway 13. Langley township has four highway interchanges along Highway 1. We are a commuter town.

[2:55 p.m.]

Since 2017, this NDP government has made nine announcements on the highway, but to date, only one completed interchange. We've been living with construction chaos for years. During that same time period, we have experienced exponential construction cost increases, procurement delays and a skilled labour shortage. Not pulling the trigger to deliver projects within Langley has caused my constituents to languish in traffic, losing productivity and time with their families.

Of Highway 10, right down the middle of Langley, and a major east-west corridor leading from Highway 1 to Surrey, our portion is still a two-lane road, with zero whispers of ever being widened. This same scenario also exists on Highway 13 through Aldergrove, mostly a two-lane road which has multiple major accidents every year, many of them resulting in high-speed fatalities.

The community hospital that I was born in still looks the same today, albeit with a few modifications. Promised an expansion under the B.C. Liberals in 2015, we are still waiting. In fact, during the fall NDP campaign announcements, this government reannounced that same expansion. Folks, that's nine years between announcements.

The reality is, we need our long-term-care project to be funded and completed before we can even think of making space for the hospital. What's that? Another five years? In 2024, this government opened an urgent care centre in Langley as a stopgap solution to our desperately underfunded hospital and primary care doctor shortage.

To quote the announcement from March last year: "The UPCC provides same-day care for people who need support for their health concerns within 12 to 24 hours but do not require an emergency department. The UPCC is available to people who do not have a primary care provider, as well as people with a provider who are unable to schedule an appointment within 12 to 24 hours."

Here's the reality of that program, on the ground in Langley. It's not regularly staffed with physicians. Patients cannot call ahead to find out whether a doctor will be there. People show up to the clinic and find out that there isn't someone there to help them, depending on what ailment they have. The effectiveness of this facility is minimal to the average user. Langley deserves better.

Then there are the schools. The province would need to build one school every year to keep up with the growth rates that we have in my riding alone. Since 2023, my constituency has had three school announcements. These announcements are not new information in Langley. These school sites have been sitting there ready to go and set aside by the municipality for years and years, but to this date, when we need a school delivered every year, none of these school projects have even commenced.

Politics has always been a part of my life. In 1999, I was knocking on doors for a school board election in my hometown. For decades, Langley operated with a small-town mindset, ignoring the clear signs of rapid growth. Watching from the sidelines, I realized the best way to create change was to step up and be the change.

I first ran for office in 2011, and after years of dedication, I was elected in 2022. Since then, I have served on council with commitment and a steadfast focus on building a better future for the community. Until three months ago, I was still wearing steel-toed boots and a hard hat, working in construction to build houses for British Columbians. When you understand housing, you can look at your growing community through a unique lens.

However, one day, my job helping shape our community's immense population boom was taken away from me and my municipal colleagues by housing bills passed by this NDP government. The township of Langley was never on the naughty list. We are not NIMBYs. We approve thousands of units a year, but with a unilateral sledgehammer, the hon. Minister of Housing felt he knew best how to plan our municipality.

[3:00 p.m.]

What he may or may not have known was that Langley township, like most cities south of the Fraser, has 3,000 acres of open, developable lands, lands on future transit corridors, with school and park sites already set aside, with civil infrastructure in place, ready for growth now.

[Lorne Doerkson in the chair.]

Bill 44 shifted and wasted city staff time to chase after hypothetical densification in built-out, stable areas, without allowing for parking requirements in a town with minimal transit options. We all drive cars. Why? I would like to take a moment to thank the member for Delta North for unintentionally encouraging me to run for provincial office.

It's more than housing. It's also health care, public safety and all the other issues that have been created and aggravated by the NDP government over the past few years. I love my hometown so much that my wants for it are viewed from non-partisan eyes. This is why I'm actually hoping this new government finds success in fixing the problems that have been affecting Langley and the province during their previous terms.

There was a significant list of NDP campaign announcements made for Langley township in the fall, things we desperately need, things that should have been finished ten to 15 years ago. I'm hoping the NDP follows through with these commitments and don't drop Langley, like they dropped the grocery rebate. I want to see the Minister of Infrastructure so often in Langley that she starts seeing it as her second home just outside of Vancouver. I don't want her there for announcements; I want her there cutting ribbons and opening facilities.

Langley is no longer a small town. It is a thriving, rapidly growing community that deserves the infrastructure, health care, schools and housing that match its needs. Yet for far too long, this government has ignored us, mak-

ing empty promises while leaving projects stalled, underfunded or outright abandoned.

The people of Langley don't need more reannouncements of the same projects, more delays, more political theatre. They need real action. They need highways that move, hospitals that heal, schools that teach and homes that are affordable.

This government has one job: to serve the people of British Columbia. If they fail to deliver for Langley, they fail all of us.

I say this to the NDP government: do your job. Cut the ribbons, not just the press releases. Most of all, don't make promises you have no intention of keeping.

To my constituents in Langley–Walnut Grove: I will fight for you every single day. I will not let this government forget our community. I will hold them accountable at every turn because Langley deserves better, and British Columbia deserves better.

Deputy Speaker: I'll recognize the Minister of Social Development and Poverty.

Hon. Sheila Malcolmson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Congratulations on your election.

Congratulations to my colleague across the way on your first speech in the House.

It's good to see a lot of new members and a lot of women elected here. I'm really honoured to be in this good company.

I'm very glad to be joining the chamber on the territory of the lək̓ʷəŋən-speaking people, the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations.

I hail from Snuneymuxw territory. That's where I live and work, and I raise my hands to the Elders, to Chief Mike Wyse. The partnerships and the friendship fuel a lot of my work.

I am feeling — I think as a lot of us are, too, in the chamber — the intensity of this time and how special it is to see people across the province, across the country, waving the flag, taking back the flag, holidaying locally. I think I read that Air Canada has already reported a 25 percent reduction in flights to the United States.

[3:05 p.m.]

People are really putting their money where their mouth is, and I love walking around the grocery store and seeing people checking labels and peering at whether it's grown in B.C. or made in Canada. It's really a special time. I'm grateful to the grocery stores and the workers that are doing their best to put labelling to make it even easier, again, for people to put their money where their mouth is and really support local businesses and local community at a key and worrying time. This is an example of the power that we have as individuals and as a community when we work together.

In this response to the Speech from the Throne, which I support, I'm going to relay some of the things that I have heard from community members about priorities of theirs and how those conversations have informed the priorities and focus of our government: helping with costs and housing; growing the economy; creating good jobs; strengthening health care; building safe, strong communities — all of that despite the challenges that people were already feeling.

The impacts of global inflation as a hangover from the pandemic are still hitting people extremely hard across North America. Global inflation has made life really expensive, and it's hit people hard, especially those who are already struggling to make ends meet. In my role as Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, I'm consumed with that. I've been in that role now for two and a bit years, and I'm grateful for everybody that has informed me about actions that we can take together to make life better for people.

We have been acting. We have been helping people with costs since 2017, helping over 163,000 people out of poverty, including 50,000 children out of poverty. In child care investments alone, since 2018, in my community in Nanaimo, $42 million has gone back to parents. In Nanaimo–Gabriola Island, we've created almost 700 new child care spaces. In all of Nanaimo and region, $76 million has gone back to parents in the form of reduced child care fees. That's probably had the single largest impact on family pocketbooks, but also getting more women especially back into the workplace.

Our government has increased the minimum wage eight times. We've increased income assistance five times. For each person, that's an increase of $450 a month more that they get since before we were elected. Those increases have been at twice the rate of inflation, and yet we have more to do.

We've doubled the seniors supplement. That was the first increase since it was created in 1987, and we've expanded it to support 85,000 seniors. Seniors' income assistance is largely delivered by the federal government, but we do have a provincial intervention we can have for people that are in the deepest need.

We've funded free prescription birth control. We are funding — I know a lot of my friends, depending where they are in their reproductive life — either in vitro fertilization or funding hormone replacement therapy. We have expanded the formulary around PharmaCare and how we are supporting people, both with health care but also with their pocketbooks.

In Nanaimo, already we have opened 1,000 affordable housing units. We've got another 600 underway, including the first student housing built at Vancouver Island University for a very long time. We have already moved 50 people in, but all together under the heart and hearth program, which is focused on homeless encampments and superloading the kind of supports that people need to prevent

homelessness, or once they get housing, to retain it. The 238 new units are a colossal increase.

Yet when we look outside, clearly there is more work for us to do. The impacts of inflation and extremely rapid population growth in our community, as it has hit so many other communities, have been phenomenal, so we continue to do more work.

We've got a plan to cut poverty. This is our second plan that we've now published. We met, mostly, our first targets, notwithstanding the impacts of global inflation, but we have goals and policies and investments to further reduce poverty and working together with members of the Green Party with some shared priorities. That's work that is going to be accelerated even further.

Another area of helping people with costs and combating poverty is the topic of food security, which is so prevalent in so many communities. We want everybody to have access to nutritious, healthy, fresh food.

[3:10 p.m.]

In my own community, Loaves and Fishes is a real pioneer in this work. They have been rescuing food. Whether organic bread ends up in the bin for chickens or whether we are reclaiming cauliflowers to go for Sunday dinner, they are distributing food across all of central and northern Vancouver Island now.

I'm really honoured to be one of their partners, but they have a great deal of corporate and volunteerism partnership, as well, in the community. We've been inspired by that work, working together with not-for-profits across British Columbia. We have been investing in food security infrastructure.

In, again, Nanaimo — but in this case, Nanaimo Foodshare Society — I got to visit Crystal Carson, who's a volunteer. She was letting me know about the impact of the refrigerator truck that we funded for Nanaimo Foodshare. She said: "Volunteering with the Good Food Box program has helped me to give back to my community and helped me make new friendships and learn new skills. The Good Food Box also helps me put food on the table, and I'm really grateful for that."

I've loved getting up north as well, to Prince George, and working with community members around funding that we had put in place for them to help implement a plan for food security for the North in particular. Food prices are so much higher and there's so much of a shorter growing season. We heard how important that was, and we're funding that work as well.

I also am grateful to the Chilliwack upper Fraser Valley regional food hub, which we funded through United Way, working with volunteers Pat and Shelley.

They showed me the best way to chop purple cabbage and told me how their school meals program, their cooking at their food hub and the work that we're also funding through school districts to get meals to kids in school, is also delivered by this community volunteerism and donations from grocery stores — again, in a lot of cases, rescuing food. And that has climate change mitigation implications as well.

This work, in every case through my ministry, is carried out in partnership with not-for-profits, Food Banks B.C. and United Way B.C. They have been very important adjudicators of which organizations get the money and multi-year funding that they are using very well, not only just for helping food banks better serve people but also building the kind of community infrastructure — greenhouses, smokehouses — that allows communities to be self-sufficient.

And then you can see from some of the programs that I'm describing that this connection into good work is another important way partly of knitting communities together and then partly just of creating good jobs for people that help put more money in people's pockets. I hear again and again that people feel better, as well as being better off, when they have work that is meaningful to them and that connects them to their community.

The work that my ministry is doing is focused on removing barriers for those who can work but have not been able to get back to the workplace. In some cases, it's just a small barrier that we can remove, and then they're back on track.

Under my ministry, the 102 WorkBC centres last year helped 94,000 people who moved along their employment journey. That could be counselling, life skills, career readiness. Sometimes it leads into something else, like maybe anger management counselling for someone that has got a job but then loses it because of conflict in the workplace.

Increasingly, WorkBC is working with more complex clients. It used to be that someone got laid off at the mill and they went to WorkBC to tidy up their resume. What we're finding more and more is that that kind of cohort tends to be hired right away by another employer. In this case, we're asking WorkBC service providers to do much more hands-on work with more complexity, and that's a really big body of the work that my ministry is doing.

I heard from some Prince George WorkBC employees that they had encountered a man, fairly elderly, living in his car with his dog because he was evicted because of the pet, and he refused to be separated from his animal. He comes to the WorkBC centre, and they were so smart about saying: "What do you like to do?" He didn't want to be separated from his dog. They got him training with our funding.

In many cases, it's federal funding that we administer, so it's not costly to the provincial taxpayer.

[3:15 p.m.]

We got him trained as a long-haul truck driver. There's a space in the cab. His dog can ride with him. Here's a guy that used to be living in his car. Now he has got a job. He is proud of what he's doing. Especially in the north, this is a real in-demand job that employers were telling me again

and again is hard to fill. Kudos to the workers at WorkBC. I know that in all 102 centres there are people solving problems for people in really imaginative ways.

We partner with community organizations all over the province to do this kind of work. We've got a pilot project, for example, in five different communities, where we have embedded employment training into bed-based addiction treatment. This is happening in Nanaimo as one of the five locations. I know that a lot of people that provide addiction treatment have had some kind of employment training built-in, but this is one where we are measuring impacts. We've got a lot of accountability.

We're able to measure already that 55 percent of the participants retained their jobs after they left bed-based addiction treatment. You can just imagine what a good thing that is, to leave addiction treatment with a new purpose and a new set of friends and not too much time on your hands. We're very optimistic about the outcomes there. We're grateful to the Canadian Mental Health Association of B.C. for partnering with us on that work.

We are also working with the YWCA in Vancouver. They're doing a lot of work with us with immigrant women who have poor or no English language skills and who are fleeing intimate partner violence. I met a woman named Zina just last month. The resilience and strength that she described are truly remarkable. Working with — I think they call them interveners — someone who speaks their first language, they get job trained, get coached for applying for jobs, and then they're kind of shadowed in the first couple of months.

In many cases, these are women who have very low self-confidence, and we saw them just accelerate in their work. Zina, in particular, through this Axis program that we fund, has been able to pursue her dream of becoming an educator. Again, the province needs more educators. We also have a program with YWCA, in the same vein, that's training early childhood educators. Again and again, we're working both to help people out of poverty and overcome barriers but also to fill market needs that are really in demand.

This kind of work I described in a presentation, because we're also partnering with the B.C. Chamber of Commerce, funding some sort of gap analysis from their members around jobs that they were having a difficult time filling. For me to be able to take them and their members through a whole range of examples….

I met a man I'll never forget, on the Downtown Eastside, named Michael. I can't remember which nation. I'm so sorry, Michael. Somewhere on the north coast. He had an acquired brain injury. He'd been homeless, struggling with addiction.

Through Lookout Society, again with a program that we funded, he test-drove a number of different jobs, one in their food bank. He learned about warehousing and restocking, but what he really liked was being a janitor. He says to me: "I am the best janitor you've ever seen. Everybody wants to hire me." He has a full-time job. He's got a solid place to live. His grandmother is so proud of him. He's living a sober life.

You know, these stories, one at a time, and especially when I'm able to tell members of chamber of commerce, who are very understandably concerned about lack of street safety or social disorder…. When we talk about individuals that have moved themselves to a new place, then you see the employer think: "Maybe I've got a hand in that. I can offer this person a job, and I know that I will be supported by a talented not-for-profit that can take the individual by the hand, give them the skills not just to get the job but to succeed in it."

For us, this is a huge win-win. It's a path out of poverty. It's a way to change people's lives, but it's also a way that the whole community can support it. I'm so grateful to the employers that prioritized this work.

I met another woman named Melissa who was working, again, through one of our WorkBC centres. She described to me a single mom, three young kids. She'd really been struggling. Through our funding, we funded her schooling. She got food and gas cards. She was able to borrow a laptop computer during her schooling. We paid for her child care, paid for some counselling for her to overcome some underlying issues. She got a job and a real fresh start for her family.

[3:20 p.m.]

Again, this is not our old, traditional model of employment training, but it is truly helping people along a continuum of employment.

That is part of the work that some of the members here who are involved in our overhaul of our old employment assistance legislation…. First time in 20 years that it's been updated. We've removed some of those barriers to these kinds of pilot project outcomes, and we're really grateful to all the people that have informed that work.

I want to talk about, also, another one of the core priorities again: investing in people and making outcomes better. I'm going to focus on my own particular community. For health care in Nanaimo, to have invested already, committed $700 million to Nanaimo hospital, to NRGH…. Ground has already been broken on the cancer centre.

We're building a new 309-bed, long-term-care home in north Nanaimo that's going to take pressure off the hospital, because a lot of people can't be discharged if they don't have appropriate long-term care, and we're rebuilding the hospital tower. Big credit to community members that have been pushing hard for this. I was really glad to be at the front of that movement.

We've introduced a new payment model for physicians, which has helped us, provincewide, connect 300,000 people with either a nurse practitioner or a family doctor. I've met a lot of people in my community that have doctors that didn't have them even a couple of months ago.

But we've got more work to do. I'm inspired that Courtenay has nobody on their waiting list for doctors, and a lot of the rest of us are hoping to get to that place too. We're working really hard to make that change.

We've made it easier for internationally trained health care professionals to get their credentials recognized. I've met people in my community that have benefited from that, and we sure benefit from it if they can practise in the field that they were trained. Fifteen hundred new nurses have been hired already, provincewide, under that program. Expanding prescribing powers for pharmacists to be able to let them prescribe birth control or antibiotics for urinary tract infections — those kinds of things.

In Nanaimo alone, we've opened 50 publicly funded addiction treatment beds. There were zero when we came into government. We've got more that we need to do, but it's really making a difference for people.

Improving ambulance response times. And on Gabriola Island, where I live and serve, for us to now have a 24-hour ambulance station…. My mate, Howard, started off as a volunteer ambulance guy 36 years ago, and times have really changed, and it's making a big difference for people. And more.

This is all kind of in this theme of building strong communities, working to break down barriers so that everybody has the ability to be there, participate fully in community and have their very best life.

A big piece of this in my ministry is community inclusion. It enriches all our communities. It makes them stronger. And when everybody can participate fully, we all benefit. That's why Community Living B.C. was created, to ensure that people with disabilities were being cared for by and in community and to give people with lived experience a voice in how they want to be supported.

I've got a quote from a letter just yesterday from the B.C. Self Advocate Leadership Network society. They say: "CLBC was created by a grassroots movement of self-advocates, families, service providers and other community and government partners who called for choice and change."

Especially since I came into this ministerial role, a lot of people in my community have taken very seriously their responsibility of educating me. I think of Alexis and Amanda and a lot of really good characters, self-advocates who have a really powerful voice.

I got to meet some of them in Chilliwack. Yeah, the Chilliwack Society for Community Living. They have a program called IMPACT. I got to meet with Rowan, who's really engaged in Special Olympics, competing in swimming and weightlifting, working in cafes as a way to practise their verbal communication.

[3:25 p.m.]

I also met Charlie, who had a dream to work with kids and now works part-time in a sports program supporting kids with disabilities — really, a great, articulate, strong guy. A handsome guy, he reminded me, and I agreed. I can just imagine that kids who themselves are struggling with disabilities just would be so inspired and, yeah, really inspired, to have someone that can relate to their experience, in leadership. He also works in a hardware store.

A woman named Amanda in Powell River, through one of the contracted Community Living B.C. service providers, had something like five different jobs, just incredibly organized and busy. Again, I'm just so grateful for the things that I've been able to learn through this role and the work of Community Living B.C.

I was also invited, along with a former MLA, Mike Starchuk, into the home of Grant Taylor. He is, again, a Community Living B.C. client. He invited me into his suite.

First thing he wanted me to know was the safety plan. In case anything went sideways, we would leave the house and go under the tree across the road in the park. Very helpful, very important. And his home-share providers, Abby and Negasi, just really showed us what it means to be a home-share provider inviting adults with developmental disabilities into their homes.

There are 4,000 people across British Columbia that are providing that service. There have been some extremely hard and terrible headlines about home share that went extremely badly, and a life was lost, and the home-share provider was criminally convicted because the woman she was responsible for died.

That story, a terrible story from seven years ago, preoccupies everybody on my team, of course, and did at the time, and a lot of changes were made. I just want to be so clear that, of course, I am grateful every day for the people that do this work and do it well, and there are 4,000 of them that are looking after people with great care.

In the final minutes that I have, also in our definition of strong communities, it includes accessibility. We are doing a lot of work still to implement our accessible B.C. legislation, again which was passed unanimously in this House.

The regulation-building is being done now by people with lived experience. I'm grateful to my friend the MLA for Juan de Fuca–Malahat, who's the Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility, leading that work, assigned by the Premier to lead that work.

We are also building strong communities with our incredible community integration specialists, which work again with my ministry. They go out and meet people where they are. You'll remember, in the past, people that were on income assistance would have a caseworker attached to them. That was cut by an old government, not ours.

We've returned that care for people that are on income assistance with an outreach model. So they'll go out to the homeless encampments. They'll go to the food banks. They'll go to the Aboriginal friendship centres, wherever they are invited. They are connecting people with care.

At Tillicum Lelum Friendship Centre in Nanaimo, because we have folks embedded in almost every Aboriginal friendship centre that wants us across the province, I met a woman named Jackie. She was the community integration specialist.

One of her clients said to me: "With the community integration specialist support, I don't have to re-explain anything. I don't have to feel like I might not explain something properly. I have a connection and personalized experience which makes me feel less fearful and like I have the ability to ask for help more transparently and more honestly."

I'm very grateful to the 185 or so of these folks that are doing work. And if any MLAs need help connecting their constituency office with these good people, please do ask me.

I'm going to say, just in my final moments, none of this work that I have described happens without not-for-profit organizations being involved. Capacity-building for not-for-profits is also housed within my ministry. This is really important work.

My friend down the way here, the MLA for Vancouver-Strathcona, matriarch in our midst, is the Parliamentary Secretary for Community Development and Non-Profits.

[3:30 p.m.]

If one had a not-for-profit in your community that didn't get a gaming grant or something, then you would still channel them to the appropriate ministry. But if you've got concerns, as I do, about how hard the not-for-profits are working and what we can do to build their capacity and support their longevity and sustainability, that's overarching work that the Premier has asked the parliamentary secretary and myself to lead.

We are extremely grateful to them. We funded significant low-barrier, multi-year grants for them two years ago, $90 million altogether over about three or four years, but we know how hard they are all working. Again, hands raised to the sector. They've got enormously big hearts, and we are all grateful for them.

In my final moment, while I'm speaking of working together, my love of my life, Howard William, is with me in everything, whether it's knocking on doors or making me popcorn when I come home late at night or sending me off with delicious herbal tea in the morning. I'm grateful for you.

My mom and dad, Samuel and Ann, I think are watching, and I love…. You have gotten me to right where I am today.

My amazing local support. Darcy Olsen, is my ministerial adviser but embedded in Nanaimo. She's part of a three-generation constituency assistant family, and she's incredible.

Kirstin Mahaffy is a big-hearted, beautiful worker in my constituency.

Lucy Morel, although she's a casual worker, has been filling in for a lot of really challenging staff illnesses lately. Lucy, you've been incredible.

Iris Taylor is my incoming and Terre Flower my outgoing riding executive president, and I'm grateful for those strong women doing this work.

In closing, all these stories that I have told are all about working together, all about supporting each other, and especially at this time where we are feeling tremendous threat from Trump's tariffs. I think we are all feeling collectively that no matter what's thrown at us, we are going to stick together. We are going to watch out for those who are harmed, particularly communities and sectors, business leaders, workers.

We are determined to support each other, to support people, because we know that investing in people makes us all better. It means a healthier, more inclusive and stronger community, a stronger province.

I'm so grateful to the voters who allowed me to do this work in cooperation together.

Thank you for your attention and for the opportunity to indicate my support for the throne speech.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. When I recognized you, I missed a very important word in your title, and I apologize for that. Thank you to the Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction. Thank you very much.

Linda Hepner: Hon. Members, distinguished guests and, most importantly, the people of Surrey–Serpentine River, one of British Columbia's brand-new ridings…. It comprises West Cloverdale, east Newton, goes north to the Tynehead Regional Park and has acres of beautiful farmland along the Serpentine River.

It is with deep humility and profound gratitude that I rise today to respond to the throne speech. I do so not just as a representative but as someone who has spent decades walking alongside the people of Surrey, listening to their concerns and celebrating their successes.

My own journey in Surrey began some 40 years ago. I know, it's hard to believe. I first joined the city in its law department, having worked as a paralegal in Manitoba and later providing legal support to an Alberta mining company, developing a gold mine in the Northwest Territories. I didn't buy the gold, something I regret to this day.

After some 21 years in Surrey, I retired as its economic development manager to join the political arena, where I served another 13 years. I have worked during those 13 years with many of the Premiers in British Columbia: Gordon Campbell, Christy Clark and the late, well-respected and loved John Horgan.

[3:35 p.m.]

Each of these Premiers was different, but the common thread was cooperation and communication with the city of Surrey and help in advancing its plans and objectives. I

don't see either the transparency or the collaborative spirit that was formerly alive and well. And I would hope now that in this legislative session, we see that change. To serve in this Legislature is a privilege and a trust bestowed upon us by the people who believe in our ability to make their voices heard and their lives better.

I want to acknowledge those who worked hard on my campaign to bring me to this House: Deborah Coult, who is now my very able constituency assistant; Patrick Kinsella, who has a long history as a Conservative political scion; Jacee Shaeffer; Stew Braddick; Manjit Saini; Aran Cheema; Kultar Thiaira; Margot Gauley; and so many others. I apologize if I have forgotten someone, but there are just too many to name individually.

I'd like to give a special thanks to my family for their ongoing support: my husband, Alan, my son, Gordon, and my grandsons. They have given up time, attention and the occasional decent meal for me to be here.

I retired for six years, and I joined the Conservative Party because I believed that so many things needed to change. I was dismayed to learn that one in three young people were thinking of leaving or trying to leave this province, and as a grandma, that was just not something that I could stand still and do nothing about.

As I reflect on my many years of service in local government, I am reminded that public service is not measured in years alone but on the impact that we have on those we are honoured to serve. However, what I'm hearing as I stand in the arena at a hockey game, at the lacrosse box, or at a soccer pitch — that's what happens when you have five grandsons — is how unaffordable life is for so many.

By example, what used to be a volunteer community program that served some 700 meals a day in Cloverdale has now more than tripled, and a school breakfast volunteer program that is delivered by our firefighters to all inner-city schools has now expanded way beyond that. In fact, now some of the children show up on weekends looking for that one meal. That breaks my heart.

I hear the government saying its focus is ensuring families are looked after, but I don't see the reality of that on the ground. But to all the volunteers who are doing a phenomenal job filling in for the blanks in the system, I say thank you.

Currently one of the issues in my riding right now is a proposed crematorium next to the Serpentine River. I have a petition with thousands of signatures on it in my office in opposition to the crematorium, suggesting that it is not a good use, right beside the Serpentine River and in a residential area.

I have taken the time to write to the mayor and council about the concerns of my constituents, and I have also noted that the petitioners have asked several times for assistance from the Minister of Environment.

I am proud to have been, in my riding, part of the opening of the Surrey Sport and Leisure Complex — I think we just saw the WickFest women's hockey tournament there recently — and to build out the Cloverdale Athletic Park, which is also in my riding.

In a nod to the Greens, I wanted to acknowledge that I spearheaded North America's first anaerobic digester plant that not only fuels our city's garbage trucks with your banana peels and your organic waste, but it powers thousands of Surrey homes.

[3:40 p.m.]

As B.C.'s fastest-growing city, now approaching some 700,000 people and having a greater number of children than anywhere else in this province, the needs are ever-growing. Surrey has, for a long time, been underserved. By way of example, to have only 18 pediatric beds in a city with more children than anywhere else should be a disgrace.

The need for a children's hospital is very evident. The new hospital that is proposed in Cloverdale doesn't even have a maternity ward, and we in Surrey have one classroom of children born every single day. To build a new hospital without the pediatrics, without being large enough to be a children's hospital, without a maternity ward, just doesn't make sense for a city the size of Surrey.

I am currently charged with the role of shadow critic for Housing. British Columbians are facing a housing crisis that is crushing families, young professionals and seniors alike. Rents are unaffordable. Home ownership is slipping further out of reach, and communities are being hollowed out as people are forced to leave in search of affordable housing.

This is the number one issue on many of the minds of British Columbians, yet in yesterday's throne speech — now the day before — the B.C. NDP barely even mentioned it. Instead of offering real solutions, they throw out an arbitrary housing target, just like last time, which was, I think, 300,000.

We have heard it all before. Flashy headlines, no results. Why? Because they refuse to cut through the red tape strangling development. Fundamentally, for housing to become affordable, new supply should grow to match demand, or preferentially to be even higher than demand, so that the downward price pressure on home prices and, especially, rents can be realized by the market rather than through arbitrary rent caps and taxes.

Most of the NDP policies on housing have scared private sector investment away from building new homes. The industry has told me separately, in several meetings over the last few months, that the pro forma simply will not work. In essence, the B.C. NDP has taxed and regulated housing so much that it has killed it, and now it's trying to resuscitate it with various loan guarantees and subsidies.

It is my fervent hope that in this time of uncertainty we can agree to aggressively look at all opportunities to examine legislation that has escalated the cost of building. Housing starts dropped 9.2 percent in British Columbia

last year. Worse, in the Vancouver metropolitan census area, we saw a 15 percent decline.

It is time to help British Columbians, especially when some of the answers are in our own backyard. Kill the carbon tax. It's killing the cost of everything related to housing and everything else from windows, from doors, from fridges, from stoves. It needs to be gone.

[3:45 p.m.]

Get rid of the step code, at least as a tariff relief if nothing else. Double-pane windows will do in a crisis. We don't all need triple-pane windows in a new building. It's a crisis. Let's go with the double code and kill the step code.

And for heaven's sake, kill Bill 44. It's anti-democratic. It's overreach at the highest order. As former local government, it's completely insulting to local people who elect their governments to actually manage their communities. Get rid of it.

The path of public service is not an easy one.

Deputy Speaker: Member, I hate to interrupt you, but we have another member that's about to seek leave, I believe.

Rohini Arora: I seek leave to make an introduction.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

Rohini Arora: Thank you so much, and apologies to the member. Visitors are here, and I wanted to make sure that I got an opportunity to introduce them.

I'm hoping you'll all join me in welcoming the SFU International Club. There are eight folks here that are visiting today. It is a club that is at Simon Fraser University, which is based in my home riding of Burnaby East.

It is a club that brings students together, building a better cross-cultural understanding and learning more about international relations through many activities and events. It's also a place where they're able to build support and a social network in the university.

If everyone could just join me in welcoming Lyndon Lee, who is the program coordinator; Atiqa Khan; Fatemeh Hashemolhosseini; Inayat Inayat; Jeeya Khavadia; Pal Rohit Tilva; and Yulissa Paccori.

Deputy Speaker: My apologies to Surrey–Serpentine River. Take it away.

Debate Continued

Linda Hepner: The path of public service is not an easy one. It is a calling that demands perseverance, integrity and an unwavering dedication to the public good.

Over many years, I have had the privilege of seeing firsthand the resilience of our communities: the farmers in Surrey–Serpentine River and beyond, who work from dawn to dusk to feed our province; the small business owners, who take risks to build something meaningful; the front-line workers, who keep our essential services running.

These are the people who inspire me. They are the backbone of my riding, and they deserve leadership that reflects their own strength, their values and their commitment to community.

Today is a time of change and challenges: industries struggling, families trying to make ends meet and certainly a world that grows increasingly uncertain. These challenges require not just leadership but vision — a vision that extends beyond election cycles, a vision that puts people first.

The throne speech sorely spoke to issues all too familiar to our province, but they have all been cloaked with the veil of tariff threats. Dangerous drugs on the streets is not new to British Columbians, and the Conservative Party has been calling for a major course correction for more than two years. Hospitals in crisis is not new to a tariff threat. A housing crunch that worsens with crippling legislation is not new to tariffs.

Determining at this stage of governing that economic success and fast-tracking is a panacea to tariffs is hopefully not a too little, too late awakening. Economic success should have been top of mind for the last eight years, along with many other issues.

As we move forward in this legislative session, let us remember why we're here. We were not elected to serve a party or to carry a title. We were elected to serve people, and that means ensuring that every decision we make now is rooted in the best interests of our constituents. No one enters public life to seek comfort. We enter it to fight for what is right and to leave our communities better than we found them.

[3:50 p.m.]

To the people of Surrey–Serpentine River: thank you. Thank you for your trust and for allowing me the honour of standing in this House on your behalf. May this session be one of progress, of integrity and of unwavering dedication to the people we all serve.

Steve Morissette: I am truly honoured and humbled to be standing here addressing the British Columbia Legislature. I stand here proud to be a resident of Fruitvale, representing the riding of Kootenay-Monashee, and as Parliamentary Secretary for Rural Development.

I am very grateful for the support of the good people of my riding in Kootenay-Monashee, really the best riding in the province. I say that in jest. We all think we're in the best riding in the province, and we are. We're in the best place for us.

Congratulations to all 93 MLAs in this Legislature.

Thank you all for making the sacrifices it takes to earn a seat and represent your riding. I am certain there is more that unites us in our work for our ridings in British Columbia than divides us. We are here to support and work for British Columbia, and I look forward to the work ahead for all of us.

I'd also like to thank my local government friends that voiced support for me: from Grand Forks, Mayor Everett Baker — whom apparently everyone here knows, he's not in my riding but still a supporter; Rossland mayor Andy Morel; Warfield mayor Frank Marino; Trail mayor Colleen Jones; Montrose mayor Mike Walsh; recent RDKB chair Linda Worley and vice-chair Ali Grieve; as well as my fellow directors.

I'd like to take the opportunity also to thank and recognize the dozens of people that worked so hard and selflessly to help put me in this seat. There are many old friends, as well as many people I had never met. They volunteered and worked hard to do, as you know, the multitude of tasks it takes to get here.

I'd also like to thank our MP, Richard Cannings, and the former NDP MLAs in my riding for stepping up and offering their support: Chris D'Arcy, Corky Evans and, of course, Katrine Conroy.

The two people who became my awesome constituency advisers, Angelika Brunner and Sarah Brownlee, took key roles in the campaign. I am so happy that they are here with me this week for the throne speech and in the gallery while still working away from home.

I would also like to thank the Kootenay-Monashee NDP electoral district association, who, other than my predecessor, Katrine, did not know me at all prior to the election.

Thank you for putting your trust in me.

Thank you particularly to president Duff Sutherland and his wife, Edena Brown, who is also my adviser in my parliamentary secretary role. Edena was former Minister Conroy's adviser through 20 years in the Legislature, so I've got a lot of great experience behind me, and I'm grateful to have her.

I'd also like to thank my former village of Fruitvale CAO, employees and council. I appreciate you and your support.

Finally, what is more important than family? I have gratitude for the support of my wife, Kelly, who has been by my side supporting me for well over 45 years. She has always supported me through whatever new and crazy challenges I have stepped up to. So here I am with her unconditional support.

[3:55 p.m.]

I have the support, as well, of our four boys, two grandsons and two granddaughters, with a third grandson scheduled to arrive next week. Unfortunately we won't see him for a while because he's going to arrive in Cardiff, Wales.

Here I am speaking to the House. A year ago, this wasn't even a thought for me. I fully expected Minister Conroy to continue in her role, and I expected to carry on as mayor of Fruitvale and in my many other regional roles. But you never know when an opportunity will arise. I've always loved a challenge and have never been afraid of change.

As a matter of fact, when I got a call and I had to decide whether I was going to run or not, it was just as I was driving into our driveway. I went in the house and told my wife, and she said: "Well, you take some time to think about it, but I know you're going to do it." She was right.

I was drawn to the NDP by my experience in local government. I was really impressed by their communication with us, their organization of regular Teams meetings with mayors and regional district chairs to keep us up to date and listen to feedback around the pandemic and the various emergencies we have faced, from wildfires to floods. This communication had never happened before and was well received by myself and other local leaders.

I saw our government's investment in communities throughout our riding and beyond. A multi-million-dollar new ambulatory care wing was added to Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital. A new MRI is on its way, with a building expansion to house it. A new community health centre has been supported for Trail. We received 24-7 full-time ambulance attendants in my own little rural area.

There have been new daycares funded in Castlegar, Trail and Fruitvale. Several local industries have had expansions supported financially by our government. There have been new housing complexes supported in Trail, Rossland and New Denver, which was formerly in our riding.

In my own little community of Fruitvale, we were able to work with the government to achieve the largest provincial investment in our little community by any government in the past 55 years. We were able to secure B.C. Housing funding through a partnership with Jan Morton and the Lower Columbia Affordable Housing Society for a fully accessible 31-unit affordable housing complex that will open this year.

We also built and opened the previously mentioned new 37-seat child care centre in 2024. Ironically, both the child care and housing were built on the site of the last big investment in Fruitvale, the former Beaver Valley Middle School, which opened in 1970.

As I said, I love a new challenge and the potential for good that new opportunities bring. This is what really attracted me to join this team. It is not the challenges you face that define you; it is how you respond to the things that challenge you that defines the person you become.

I'll tell you some personal things here. In my family, I have faced several challenges. The first came as a teenager and my first experience with loss. I was fortunate to have been raised in a close-knit family, as the baby of four kids. My brother was the eldest and ten years older than myself.

Despite the age difference, we were close. He was my mentor and role model.

One cold November Saturday when I was 15, my brother and my sister's husband of three months went to town for something, but neither returned. They were both killed in a car accident, gone in the blink of an eye. They each left a widow behind, and my brother also left a five-month-old infant and a toddler.

[4:00 p.m.]

That one event impacted several lives forever. It took me a few years to navigate the loss and find my path forward. It was difficult, but that tragedy set me up to deal with future challenges.

A few years later, I met and married my wife, Kelly, and set out on life. We have five — yes, five — boys. We have lived through and grown through several challenges, losses and an abundance of fun. Our second boy lost an eye to retinoblastoma, cancer of the retina, at 16 months old.

At this same time, we were also expecting our third boy. He was born three months later. But sadly — he was five weeks old — we woke up four days before Christmas to find that he had passed overnight from sudden infant death syndrome.

There was a lot going on, but we were blessed with strong family and friend support. After the cancer danger was reduced for our second son, we had two more boys and a very full and boisterous house, as you can imagine.

We had lots of fun as they grew and matured. We encouraged them to follow their passions, and they did. One became a tradesperson. One became a high school math teacher. One became a professional hockey player in Europe and built a home in Cardiff, Wales.

The youngest loved music and played guitar, and any instrument he could get hold of, from the time he was five years old. He earned a diploma in audio engineering and made it near the end of the old TV show *Canadian Idol*. He became a professional musician based out of Toronto, as well as touring through Canada and Asia throughout the years. When the pandemic hit, he became a casualty. As a musician, all his work dried up — out of work and forced to move home for 18 months.

As things reopened, he headed to Vancouver in early 2022. Imagine our shock when I received a cold call from a spinal surgeon at Vancouver General in the ICU unit. Our son had fallen four stories and was on life support, as he had broken his spine at C2 as well as T7. We rushed down to Vancouver.

The surgeons told us he had transected his spinal cord at C2, and there was no hope of recovery beyond maybe being able to move his shoulders. Following five months in ICU and three in G.F. Strong, he has ended up in Kelowna at the only long-term-care home in the Interior that can provide the level of care he needs.

While we were going through this, one of my sisters was diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumour and, following a 15-month battle, succumbed to it. Not a great time in our family, again, but we held together.

We were very thankful for our health care system throughout all of this. We know there are challenges and weaknesses. The throne speech addressed health care, and I look forward to the continuing work on improvements planned by our government.

We are super proud of the way our son has accepted this new reality with dignity and strength and has continued to create art through voice command on his iPad. He is producing some of his own music from his catalogue that he had previously written and recorded. He has written a book entitled *Mind Over Madness* that is at the publishers and will be soon out in print and e-book form.

I really hesitated to share this personal story in the House. It's not to garner sympathy or anything. Everyone in British Columbia faces really hard and heartbreaking challenges throughout their lives, sooner or later. Be it poor health, injury, substance use, financial crisis, it is important to know, when you are going through one of these times, that people have gone through all manner of tough times before you but can still come out thriving and enjoying life again. Life is good. It is easy for the weight of challenges to take you out.

[4:05 p.m.]

I believe happiness is a choice, and when you choose to be positive and take one step at a time, things get better, and life is good. This same positive approach and attitude is needed in B.C. and across Canada right now.

As outlined in the throne speech, our country and province suddenly, for no logical reason, is faced with fearful, disrespectful rhetoric from our closest neighbour, ally and friend that has shaken us as a country. We are grieving the loss of our friendly, mutually beneficial relationship that we had.

We have two choices. We can curl up in the corner and wait for the next statement from No. 47, or we can move positively and decisively to build new allies, diversify trading partners, support new growth and work to reduce trade barriers across our own country. We cannot lament what was. We must move forward. I am energized to action by the throne speech, to work toward these goals for British Columbians.

There may be hard times ahead, but we will come out stronger and more independent. I'm proud of the leadership already shown in this direction by our Premier and the Premiers of every political stripe across this country, modelling that there is more uniting us than dividing us.

In my own riding, we have great people doing amazing work to build a new economy, to build new jobs that weren't even thought of five years ago, to add value and jobs to every cubic metre of fibre that is cut out of our forests, to extract every possible critical mineral out of the ores that we process, to train people for emerging jobs.

In my riding, I must highlight the work on the south

Columbia region done by the Lower Columbia Initiatives Corp. This is a volunteer organization with a board of skilled volunteers that have been working on the circular economy in the south portion of my riding that they have branded as metal tech alley.

In this area, we have Cirba Solutions, a battery recycling facility that recycles most of British Columbia's lithium-ion and alkaline batteries, the batteries we use every day. They have two specialized processes, and out of the two batteries, they recover 93 percent of the valuable materials.

Next door to Cirba is KC Recycling, a recycler of lead-acid batteries that are in every vehicle on the road. Even EVs use them for their accessories. They have processes to extract the lead, the acid, and to process the plastic cases into pellets. Lead and acid mostly go to our local lead-zinc smelter in Trail. The plastic pellets go back to the battery manufacturers to be recycled into new battery cases. Everything in the battery is recycled except the little fabric pouches covering the battery plates.

Our government has supported them with nearly $2 million in grants over the past three years to nearly double their capacity and to support their plastic recycling. So far, they have grown from 40 workers in 2022 to 60 and growing.

Our largest local employer, the Teck Trail smelter, is currently doing a feasibility study on building a new facility on their site to process EV batteries for the critical minerals within them. These businesses and ideas are being developed to market the area as the western Canadian Pacific Northwest battery recycling hub.

KC Recycling is already the largest lead-acid battery recycler in western Canada and the Pacific Northwest. The Teck Trail smelter processes ore shipped from their Red Dog mine in Alaska to produce lead, zinc and multiple by-products such as gold, silver, antimony, gallium and other critical minerals. They also produce a lot of sulphuric acid, which is shipped by rail to customers in the Pacific Northwest to turn into fertilizer for American agriculture.

[4:10 p.m.]

Some of their critical minerals are sold off to a spin-off business in Trail called Fenix Advanced Materials, where they grow crystals using a high-tech process. The crystals are then sold to the U.S.A. to build things like night-vision goggles, instrument displays and so on for the military.

The owner of Fenix Materials, Don Freschi, has also been engaged with UBC Okanagan for a few years in developing a new long-range, quick-charging EV battery using another of Teck's byproducts, tellurium.

Selkirk College also has their Technology Access Centre lab, or STAC lab, located adjacent to Fenix Materials. At this facility, they have the latest high-tech equipment to scan, 3D-print, CNC-machine and water jet–cut, and to build and program robotic arms in order to teach processes and often build parts that cannot be purchased anywhere for local industry.

Some of the hydro dams in areas of the Teck smelter are 80 to 100-plus years old, but with this technology they can reproduce critical parts relatively easily for these old, old plants.

At the STAC lab, they also have a collection of robotic arms donated by an auto manufacturer that they program to do specialized tasks. This past fall, I watched them set up one to attach to a new model of ski boot from a major manufacturer for a specialized photographer that came down from Rossland so they could rotate and turn the boot while he did a video of its new design for the ad campaign.

They also are in the midst of building a training program for tradespeople to learn how to service particle accelerators, which are becoming commonplace, particularly in health, in hospitals and health labs for doing things such as processing blood.

In the greater Castlegar area, we have the Mercer-Celgar pulp mill, which is also a cornerstone of employment in our riding. Over the past 30 years, they have completed several multi-million-dollar upgrades to improve efficiency and green their processing. Last year Mercer-Celgar entered into an agreement with the Okanagan Indian Band to support fibre for the pulp mill.

In South Slocan, we have Kalesnikoff mass timber. My friend Ken Kalesnikoff is here this week. It's a fourth-generation forestry company headed by Ken and family that six years ago, with support from our government, diversified from just producing dimensional lumber to making a large investment in a plant that produces cross-laminated timber, glulam beams and glulam panels. They can use multiple species in their products, which leads to supporting biodiverse forestry for the future versus the old monoculture forests.

This facility and their traditional sawmill support 320 jobs, some of which are high-tech jobs from Selkirk College's digital design and fabricating diploma course. These locally trained specialists program and operate computerized equipment to manufacture the prefabricated panels and beams for diverse buildings sold throughout Canada and the U.S.A.

With support of a $6.7 million grant from our manufacturing jobs fund, last year Kalesnikoff entered into an agreement with the city of Castlegar to purchase property adjacent to the Castlegar airport and build another facility that will produce more prefabricated mass timber and cross-lam timber modularized building products to support the rapid multi-storey construction of housing, schools, health care centres and other needed infrastructure using sustainable, made-in-B.C. products, supporting 100 new jobs in this facility alone.

This is what the future looks like for sustainable forestry jobs. Get the most possible jobs out of the cubic metres of fibre that is sustainably available in our forests.

[4:15 p.m.]

On the north end of my riding, we have Cherryville, an unincorporated community of about 1,050 in the regional district of North Okanagan, area E, of director Jim Johnson. This is a beautiful and passionate rural community of ranching, forestry and agriculture. They have a small community forest that last year helped them purchase a wildfire truck to support the community.

Now the Cherryville Firewatch Society is working to raise money to build a hall to house the fire truck with another donation from the community forest and some corporate donations. Small rural communities get things done by working collaboratively between societies, businesses and different levels of government.

Back in the south end of my riding, in my community of Fruitvale, we have another third-generation forestry company, ATCO Wood Products, owned and managed by Rebecca and Scott Weatherford. ATCO began as a dimensional lumber sawmill, but early in the '70s, they built a value-added facility that peels logs to produce a very high-value veneer, of which the majority is then moved by rail from the plant to customers in the U.S.A. that produce plywood from it.

Three or four years ago, for a customer-specific request, they bought and custom-modified a special lathe to produce ten-foot veneer for an American customer that couldn't source ten-foot veneer in the States. They use every piece of fibre. The cores after the veneer is peeled are cut into landscape ties, fence posts and poles for grapevines in the Okanagan and beyond. The bark is sold for landscaping and the smaller waste sold to Mercer-Celgar and an energy plant in Washington state.

You can see that the strong and innovative businesses in our riding are tied closely to American customers in most cases, leaving us vulnerable in the current climate created by No. 47. I can tell you I've met with most of these businesses, and they are not sitting idly by and waiting. They have reached out to American, Asian and European partners and are working on positive solutions ahead of time. This is not a time to sit back and cower in the corner.

We have many people and organizations supporting businesses in the riding. I've previously mentioned Lower Columbia Initiatives Corp., led by Brent Anhel; Community Futures South Kootenay, led by Erik Kalacis; and Community Futures Central Kootenay, led by Andrea Wilkey.

We also have the greater Trail Chamber of Commerce, led by Erica Krest; and the Castlegar and District Chamber of Commerce, led by Tammy Verigin-Burk.

Tammy and her board recently took on a huge challenge in planning and building a new home for the chamber, named the Castlegar Confluence building. This is a beautiful multi-purpose building that opened this past fall with publicly available meeting rooms and office spaces available for rent. The beautiful wood building was constructed with none other than local Kalesnikoff mass timber products and huge support from local businesses. This building models rural communities' strength and versatility.

I must give recognition to my friends in beautiful Rossland for their innovative work to design and build — in partnership with the Lower Columbia Affordable Housing Society, B.C. Housing and Columbia Basin Trust — a new ground-floor city hall to replace the old one, whose roof had been compromised by snow load, with three stories of workforce housing on top of the city hall.

We are also blessed with good-hearted people managing many groups and organizations, providing all manner of assistance and services to families and those less fortunate.

From the Trail community action team supporting the unhoused, the United Church and Beaver Valley food banks, the Castlegar Community Harvest food bank, Habitat for Humanity, the Lower Columbia Affordable Housing Society, Kootenay Family Place, Castlegar and District Community Services Society, FAIR and IRIS are just a few of the dedicated groups in my riding, selflessly serving others, that I'm so grateful for.

You will find strong, resilient and resourceful people from Cherryville in the north of my riding to Trail in the south. I love the resilient can-do spirit of rural people.

[4:20 p.m.]

I will close with a quote I heard last summer from former MLA Corky Evans. It was simple, but it spoke to me and will shape my time here. Corky said: "It is important that our MLA is one of us."

Thank you, hon. Speaker, for granting me this time in the House in support of our throne speech.

Anna Kindy: I am honoured to be standing here representing the constituents of the North Island.

Thanks for your support. I plan to represent you to the best of my capacity.

I also want to acknowledge John Rustad, the leader of the Conservative Party of B.C. John is an ethical, smart man with a vision of where our beautiful province should be and how to get there.

I want to thank my husband, Dr. Peter Olesen, for his unconditional love and support, and also my amazing children, Oksanna, Karina and Petro. My kids have taught and continue to teach me so much. They have opened my eyes up to things I would not have otherwise seen. I love you guys so much.

I want to give a special thanks to my campaign team: Richard, my campaign manager; his wife, Vivian; and all the selfless volunteers, many of which have become good friends.

Also, a huge thanks to my constituency assistants, Monica, Candice and Samantha. You guys are amazing and truly want to help people. You are as strong as your team.

My father left Stalin, Ukraine, in 1944, when he was 14, and eventually settled with his mother and sister in Can-

ada. My mother was born in Quebec City and was 17th of 19 children, nine of which never made it to adulthood. Both my parents instilled in me the importance of family, free speech, democracy and the belief in a higher power.

I met my husband in medical school at the University of Alberta. We both worked as GPs in Port Hardy in the early '90s. In 1992, I participated in the Albertville Olympics in France, in mogul skiing. I distinctly remember standing on top of the mogul course when they announced Anna Kindy from Port Hardy, Canada.

Peter went to retrain as a plastic surgeon and was offered a job at St. Paul's, but we wanted to return to the Island. The Campbell River community welcomed us with open arms. Those were the days when houses were cheap and decisions, including decision in medical needs, were done locally. Every patient in those days that was hospitalized had a bed. Everyone had a GP. If you didn't like your GP, you just got yourself another one.

For a few years, a team from Campbell River, including my husband and myself; Pam, Pete's secretary; nurses from the hospital and other doctors from B.C., as well, went to Guatemala together to provide surgery on the Indigenous population there, many of which made less than a dollar a day. We often brought our kids, and the experience was invaluable.

Now, about my riding. The reason we wanted to go back to Vancouver Island to the north was that it's truly a piece of paradise. Lush forests, mountains, rugged coastlines and the Pacific Ocean interspersed with islands. Wildlife abounds, be it killer whales, humpbacks, eagles, even cougars and bears. You can ski, hike, play golf all in the same day. Salmon fishing is our national sport.

Now, back to why I am standing here today. If you would have asked me if I would run in politics two or three years ago, I can honestly say it was never in my radar. But not only was there a medical crisis getting dramatically worse than the last few years, the price of housing and everything else had increased to the point where young working people could never dream of owning a home. There seemed to be government overreach in every aspect of our lives, including what medical procedure we had to get.

[4:25 p.m.]

Informed consent, doing no harm and bodily autonomy no longer applied, and as a doctor I found this unacceptable. You convince people to get a medical procedure with facts and data, and then you accept their choice, even if you don't agree with it.

The second reason I ran is my generation seemed to take everything for granted. In a certain way, we made it harder for our youngsters.

Then I decided I was going to get involved. I needed to change things for my kids. When campaigning, we door-knocked on over 17,000 doors and had countless meetings. You know, whatever we do in life, most of us live in an echo chamber. What I mean by that: I know a lot about health care, but I knew nothing about forestry or fish farms or the resource industry.

The campaign and the door-knocking allowed me to learn about what truly, economically, drives my riding and what people's needs are. Every day that I campaigned, every day that I door-knocked, I met people that were employed in the forestry industry or in the fish farm industry.

I also learned more about economic reconciliation for our First Nations and how the resource industries were lifting their communities out of poverty and giving them pride and a reason to get up in the morning. You have to remember, in March of 2024, the GNN Nations, which is a nation of about 1,000 people, had over ten suicides and deaths in a period of two months.

As a politician, we work for the people that have elected us, so it's our duty to really know issues and how they impact our constituents. We have to not fall prey to misinformation and ideological thinking. In other words, we have to use common sense and balance in approaching issues.

Now I want to talk about fish farms. It's actually a federal issue in B.C., but as a province, we need to advocate for an industry that science says is of minimal risk to wild stock. I will repeat: minimal risk to wild stock. There's no such thing as no risk. Norway has over 1,200 open-net fish farms; B.C. has 56. It provides billions of dollars to our economy, and good-paying jobs.

I was an addiction doc, and I remember one of my patients got a job at the fish farm. He's sober today, and he bought a home.

Part of economic reconciliation means jobs. For the Klemtu Nations in B.C., with their fish farm, their suicide rate and overdose rates plummeted. They even bought a smoker and are selling fish to Walmart. We're taking that away from them.

So when a decision is made in this room, we have to think of the consequences to our constituents. We have to have balance. Of course, we have to have high environmental standards, but we have to allow an industry that is renewable and provides us food and jobs to thrive if they are following the environmental standards.

Now forestry. Again, I knew nothing about forestry. Door-knocking, I learned a lot. I did go to two TLA conferences, truck loggers conferences. I was actually quite shocked. The industry was in code red. Every talk was about: how will we survive the government policies? The complexities of permitting were decimating the industry.

[Mable Elmore in the chair.]

I met people that had two generations' worth of businesses relating to forestry and that were on the verge of bankruptcy. Again, it's about achieving a balance. It's about being pro-worker and supporting a renewable resource while protecting biodiversity. We need wood. We need good-paying jobs. We need certainty in forestry, which supports families and communities.

[4:30 p.m.]

I'd like to, at this point, talk about health care. Addiction was a big part of my practice. In every decision that's made here, we have to look at the historical context as well as the unintended consequences.

When I started practising in addiction at least 25 years ago, there was real stigma towards people with addiction. Heroin was killing approximately 200 to 300 people a year. Fifteen years ago there was what I call the pain industry that came along. What did the pain industry do? Encourage doctors to prescribe OxyContin. My sister, who was an ophthalmologist in California, had to write an exam before the new year, and every specialist in California had to write it. The premise of that exam was that if you did not prescribe opiates for pain, you were liable.

What happened? Well, we created a generation of addicts. More people in certain jurisdictions were dying of prescription pills than were dying of heroin. That's the historical context that we have to look at when we give people prescriptions of unmonitored opiates. Opiates are not safe. People die from unmonitored opiates.

A few years later, fentanyl came up, and the drugs got just more toxic, and the overdoses increased. What I mean by more toxic is that they were putting illicit benzodiazepines like etizolam and other chemicals in the supply, which just increased overdoses and brain injury.

Now, 2020. We were encouraged to prescribe what was called then pandemic supply. There was no data behind it. What "pandemic supply" meant is that I didn't even need for you to be an addict. If you came to me and said, "I was addicted" or "I need some pills" and you maybe had COVID, I was supposed to give you 14 days' worth of eight milligrams of hydromorphone, 15 pills a day.

I had zero patients die of COVID, but I had many patients die of overdose. I never prescribed it, but my patients were coming to me and saying: "Why are doctors prescribing us opiates? Why are they giving us that?" The cost of dillies on the street went down from $15 to $20 a pill to $1 to $2. You just had to stand in front of the pharmacy, and you could see what was happening to that pandemic supply.

Did we need studies? No, it was obvious. My patients were telling me what was happening. But let's not listen to the doctors or the patients, right? Let's sit in this little echo chamber and do something that's actually harmful.

I didn't know that until yesterday, but 22 million pills were prescribed to 5,000 addicts, which is a tiny portion of people with addiction — 22 million pills. There are consequences to what we decide in this chamber, and we have to make sure that we think about those consequences.

We have treatment for people with addiction. There's what's called Suboxone, methadone, Kadian, Sublocade, which is an IM injection. When you start people on it, they're on daily, supervised. Why? Because addicts tend to divert.

It's not rocket science. We have to be evidence-based. There are rules to follow. When we decriminalized, what happened? Open drug use in parks, in hospitals.

When I was campaigning, I did a talk in one of the primary schools. Kids, grades 4 and 5. There was a room full of kids. I was a lot more nervous than in talking here — talking in front of kids. It was a meet-and-greet, and they were supposed to ask questions.

One kid asked a question, and another asked a question. Then one kid put his hand up, and I said, "Yep," and the kid told me about finding a needle in the park. Next thing you knew, three-quarters of the kids had their hands up to share a story of what they had seen.

Is this what we want? I don't remember that when I was in grade 4 or 5.

[4:35 p.m.]

What we need to do is stigmatize the behaviour, not the person with addiction. We've stigmatized smoking, so people aren't allowed to smoke in the hospital. Guess what. A few months ago people were smoking crack and methamphetamine in the hospital, and you could do nothing about it, but if they smoked a cigarette, they'd be reprimanded. Is that common sense?

Now, health care. I used to be proud of being a doctor. It was easy. If you wanted to refer your patient, they were seen quickly by the specialist. There were no patients in the hallways. When I went to the doctor's lounge, the atmosphere was good. Well, it's no longer that way.

There has been a dramatic deterioration. We hear about it every single day in the news or from families that have to navigate the system. Sometimes families are lucky, they navigate through the system, and it goes well, but often, it doesn't. Each one of us sitting here, each one of us, has gotten an email from a constituent waiting for their specialist appointment, waiting for cancer treatment.

This is something I need to talk about. This is where we need to, maybe, start thinking outside the box. What I mean by talking about outside the box is that if you look at other countries with universal health care, OECD countries…. These are countries like Europe, Australia, New Zealand, who have universal health care. Per GDP, we're the top spenders — top third, No. 6, I think, of 31 countries — and we're close to the bottom for number of doctors, number of hospital beds, and we're a total bottom for wait times.

What does this government then do? It passes the HPOA act, formerly known as Bill 36, one of the largest bills ever passed in B.C., over 265 pages.

I wasn't even planning to run in politics then, but I actually read the bill, cover to cover. I read it. People were asking me about it, and I said that I know nothing. I'm sort of one of those not-keener people. I don't like reading that boring stuff, but I actually read it, underlined it and understood it. And it's terrible for health care.

When it was drafted, they gave the Doctors of B.C.,

which is sort of our union, our representation, a two-week period to say what we thought about it. None of us knew about it. It was over Christmas. They had 52 responses — 52 responses. Is that listening to the stakeholder? Of course not, right? And they rammed the bill through.

The issue with the bill….

Are you guys listening? I'm just wondering. Like, do you care? Yeah, thanks for listening.

The issue with the bill is that previously, in colleges, half the board members are appointed and half are elected, so you hear what's happening on the ground. No longer. The Minister of Health…. Now the colleges will be amalgamated from 16, I think, to six. Every position is appointed, and the board, by the minister. If the minister does not like, by opinion only, what the board says, he can discharge the board.

How does that make patients more safe, when we're not even getting information from the ground? We're not even getting information from the stakeholders. I could go on about it, but I've got other things to talk about.

I want to talk about nurses, the backbone of hospitals. Nurses, the backbone of health care, really. Nurses, we all know, are quitting in droves. The attrition rate is quite high, and part of the reason is that they're burnt out.

[4:40 p.m.]

When you work for health authorities as a nurse, or any position in a health authority, you have to sign what's called a non-disclosure order. What does that mean, a non-disclosure order? You can't talk, right? You can't talk. You can't advocate for your patients.

Nurses have been reprimanded or fired for talking, for speaking out, for trying to advocate for their patients. How are we going to solve health care problems when we don't allow people to talk?

We all know about the lack of GPs. In the '90s, they thought that doctors were the problem for health care. The reason health care costs were going up was because we had too many doctors. So they cut back on medical school enrolment, without taking into account the aging population and the retirement of doctors.

If this government had looked at the data, medical school enrolment should have been, probably, doubled years ago. We just have to look at data. This government needs to collect data, look at it and start planning.

The Consultant Specialists of B.C. did a poll of 900 members. What did this poll say? Wait times are increasing. We're already the country with the longest wait times. They're still increasing. Some 89 percent of the specialists feel that patients do not have appropriate access to specialist care.

If you've got Parkinson's, let alone in a rural area…. In a rural area, if you need a pacemaker, it can take up to a year and a half. If you're an inpatient, in telemetry, unstable, waiting for a pacemaker, it can take up to two weeks. In Vancouver, if you've got progressive Parkinson's…. I was talking to a neurologist there. He has to triage every night: "Which patient am I going to see this week?" It can take up to a year.

They've got one GI specialist in Nanaimo — one — for a population of, I think, 170,000. They don't have a cath lab. In terms of how many people they service and no cath lab…. We're starting to look like third-world medicine, but we're getting used to it.

The propaganda that I'm hearing from the other side isn't working anymore. People have to navigate the system, and the stories are coming out.

You know, hospitals…. I mean, again, planning, right? Our hospital regularly runs at 130 to 150 percent capacity. It was built in 2017.

We have, now, unattached patients in emergency, admitted, that, because they are unattached, will not go upstairs. Think about that: stretchers in the hallway. Nurses describing drug use in the hospital right up to recently. Thank god we sort of did something about…. Excuse the term, but…. It's easy here to make policies.

Nurses — I was talking to one. She was third-trimester pregnant. Nursing ratios are supposed to be 4 to 1. That's what the union has said: 4 to 1. The government has said 4 to 1, except you know what? Most times you can't get 4 to 1, so the ratios are much higher. When they renegotiated this ratio, they decided to drop the five extra dollars they were getting an hour for over-census. They dropped it. But do the nurses still work over-census? Yes.

Back to that pregnant nurse. She had ten patients. Think about that — ten. She's pregnant. Two of them were smoking meth. She called her supervisor, and you know what her supervisor said? "Toughen up."

[4:45 p.m.]

This is what the reality is on the ground. Sitting here, let's think about that and let's figure out how to solve this.

Because of lack of access to care, patients are actually requesting MAiD. It has become so common that some doctors are offering MAiD as part of the treatment plan.

I think some of you guys might have been here…. Torva Logan, she's a constituent from the North Island, from Campbell River. I think she was 41 when she was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer, ovarian. The emerg doc told her: "If you can get out of Canada, get out." And at some point, she was offered MAiD.

But she had been a vet in the States, so she ended up getting care in the States. I was just texting her recently. She's still alive, but she's back in hospital. She has a child. She wanted to live. Those are the realities on the ground.

I think the big part of our job as an MLA is to really, really look at everything we do. That's why I'm actually…. I have to say, I'm proud to be on this side. I'm not saying I'm not proud to be on the other side. I'm just proud to be on this side. One of the reasons is that John said: "You can vote according to your conscience. You can vote according to what your constituents want."

Deputy Speaker: Member, just a reminder. We don't use the names of members in the House.

Anna Kindy: Okay, sorry about that.

I think part of the job as an MLA is to listen to the constituents, bring their concerns forward and make sure you keep the government honest. I think the most important thing is for all of us to remember who we are working for.

Deputy Speaker: Just a reminder for everyone, if there are any comments, to address them to the Chair or through the Chair.

Hon. Mike Farnworth: It's my pleasure to rise and take my place in the throne speech debate. It has been interesting listening to members and their speeches from both sides of the House.

Every time we have a throne speech, it's an opportunity to hear people who have been around this chamber for a while. In my case, this is my eighth term serving as the MLA for Port Coquitlam, then Port Coquitlam–Burke Mountain and then back to Port Coquitlam. It's also an opportunity to hear members who are speaking here for their first time.

The thing that always strikes me, and it's something that I reflect on, is what an incredible privilege that each of us have to stand in this place. It is probably the most…. Well, it is the most exclusive club in the province of British Columbia. We are the only ones, the 93 of us, who are allowed to speak in this chamber on behalf of the people who elected us.

When you think about that, reflect on this building and on the more than 100 years that this has served as the place where the laws are made in our province, it's a pretty special place. The laws made in this province to benefit people, to grow our economy, to protect our land, to correct injustices — this is where this all happens. Each of us comes here with a different perspective, different skills, different outlooks, but all of us want to do the best for our constituents, the people that elected us.

[4:50 p.m.]

It's not a perfect place. We look back at laws that were passed a century ago, often discriminatory. but they reflected the people and they reflected the attitudes of those times. We have the ability…. We reflect the attitudes and the sensibilities of our time.

What I always hope is that we understand that change needs to take place and that we change as people's views change. We change as we become more aware of what the issues are. We are able to remedy those ills. We are able to remedy the mistakes of the past and, at the same time, put in place laws that are going to benefit not just today, but future generations.

I've had the privilege, as I said a moment ago, of doing this for some time now. This is my eighth term. I could not do it without the support of the constituents: the people of Port Coquitlam, the town that I grew up in and have called home since 1969. I could not do it without the support of my family, my siblings: my sister and my three brothers. I couldn't do it without the support of my partner, Doug — it's 36 years, in March, that we have been together; and many friends.

To me, representing the city of Port Coquitlam is probably the greatest honour that one could have. As I said, I've lived there since 1969. At that time, Port Coquitlam was about 12,000 people. It was a small community. It was, and still is in many ways, a railway town.

The railway was the major industry at the time, along with what was referred to as Essondale back then, now Riverview, which is now no longer there. You had the mill in Port Moody, and you had the mill in Maillardville, and those were the main employers in our community.

One of the events that I always look forward to every year — and have done since I was a kid — is our annual May Day celebration. It's our celebration of Port Coquitlam. It's our celebration of PoCo. Every May, we have the crowning of the May Queen, and then in fall we have a May ambassador as well. We have a great parade.

When I was first elected, the parade would go from the south side of town. It's because in Port Coquitlam, you have the railway yard. That is why the town started in the first place. Before it became PoCo, it was Westminster Junction, and it is the largest railway yard in Western Canada. I worked there for four years. It divides the town into two halves: north side and south side.

Growing up, it was: "Are you a north- or are you a south-sider?" The fascinating thing about the May Day parade at that time was that it would start on the south side of town, and it would go down Shaughnessy Street, and it would go under the underpass, and then it would come to the Lougheed Highway.

We were able back then, because we were so small and remote, to block and shut down the Lougheed Highway to traffic so that the parade could go from one side of town to the other side of town. The idea of being able to do that today — that stopped about 1972, but it gives you an idea of the community as it was when I was a boy.

Since that time, the community has grown immensely. It's now more than 61,000 people with a wide range of industries in the community that employ a diversity of people. The demographic of our community has changed significantly over the years. When I was a boy, I guess, it was very much a town of European background. There was not much demographic diversity.

Today that's changed significantly. Over the last ten years in particular, the demographics have changed to where we are now about 60 percent or 40 percent visible minorities. From a demographic point religiously, my community has changed.

At one time it was, certainly when I was first elected

and up until probably about 2011, the most Catholic riding in the province, where about 40 percent of my constituents self-identified as Catholic. That's changing. It was also the constituency that had the lowest number of university degrees, but the highest number of skilled tradespeople. It was also, in terms of family size, larger than most.

[4:55 p.m.]

When I look back at going to school, it was pretty evident. There were a lot of four- or five-kid families, three-kid families. It was very much a great place to grow up.

It's a community that is very much focused on families, ensuring that we've got the recreational facilities that we need to have, that we have the outdoor heritage, the outdoor trails, an environment that we need to have, and that we've got the industries required to support a growing economy and a growing community.

Some of those industries I've talked about. I mentioned the railway, still the largest employer in town. We've seen the arrival of Saputo, the major dairy, which is now in the production of milk and yogurts and cheeses and things. It's an enormous facility that is in our industrial area.

At the same time, it's also a community with hundreds and hundreds of small businesses, many of which have been there for over 100 years. I can think of some, such as PoCo Building Supplies, which is still on the original site that it has been in, in downtown PoCo, since 1921 — a family-owned business, still a family-operated business today.

Businesses such as Forrest Marine, which provide a lot of the towing and the river work that takes place in my community. Mike Forrest and his family have operated that business since before the '40s. These are family-owned businesses that are part and parcel of the community that I represent and the community that I call home. It's something that I am incredibly proud of.

As I said, I've represented the community now for eight terms since 1991. When I reflect on that time, both in government and in opposition, the thing that I've always enjoyed is being able to work with both, in opposition, with those in government, and vice versa, to be able to get things done for people in our community, to be able to get things done for people in the province.

That's one of the things that I find in talking about the throne speech and the challenges that we face, the challenges that have been outlined in the throne speech in dealing with the situation that we have right now.

It is unprecedented in terms of the economic threats that we are seeing from south of the border, from the President in the White House, who has threatened us economically. I think he has disrespected our government, both nationally and provincially, in a way that we have never seen from a nation which we have always viewed as our best friend and ally.

As I reflect back on that relationship between the United States and Canada, from 1939 to 1945, Canada stood to defend democracy. The United States fought alongside us from 1941 to 1945. In 1914, in the First World War…. From 1914 to 1918, Canada again stood to defend democracy. The United States fought alongside us from 1917 to 1918. This country has never shied away from standing up for what is right, and we are not about to change that.

We want to make sure that what we have in place are the necessary tools to protect British Columbians, to protect the services that we all care about, whether it's education, whether it's health care, whether it's child care, the environment. To do that, it means growing the economy.

It means ensuring that we're able to get those projects that need to happen, to get them moving. If there are barriers in place, let's find ways to remove them. Let's work with other provinces to ensure that we are putting Canada first. That's what this throne speech is very much about. That's why I'm pleased to speak to it. That's why I'm pleased today to rise and offer my thoughts on that.

I mentioned a moment ago challenges that we're facing today.

[5:00 p.m.]

We've faced challenges before, and we've always come through them. We've faced challenges in COVID. Together as a province, together as a country, we dealt with that. We came through that, always making sure that we're supporting our citizens, whether they be British Columbians or Canadians. That's the approach that this government and this side of the House has always taken.

I know what it's like to be in opposition. I've spent 12 years in opposition and 16 in government. I know the role of opposition, which is to critique government, to hold government's feet to the fire, and it's a very important role. I also know this: that government operates best when its feet are held to the fire, when it is held to be accountable.

The same in terms of the opposition, in recognizing that government also has a responsibility, and government has the right to get its agenda through. In my mind, it's always by working together that we do that.

I reflect back in terms of what drew me into politics in the first place. It was a land use decision, the area known as Colony Farm. At that time, it was looking at being developed, but at the same time, the Coquitlam River ran through it, and the river was important to the Coquitlam First Nation. The salmon run is important to our community.

It was that issue that got me to run for city council, and I was successful. In our first term, we worked to turn that into a regional park. I learnt, in my first term as an MLA, how to work with ministers in government, how to work with members of the opposition to get issues that mattered to us in place.

Important matters such as transportation. Whether it was building the West Coast Express…. At the time, there were those who said: "No, no, we should not put that in place." That was put in place. The reality is we have a

transportation system involving West Coast Express that is extremely popular, going all the way out from Mission all the way into Vancouver.

Building on work that had been done by previous governments in terms of dealing with some of our transportation, transit issues. The SkyTrain, for example. The Expo Line that was put in was incredibly successful. I was lucky enough to be the minister that worked on ensuring that we get the Millennium Line built.

Then since that, the previous government put in place the Canada Line. Now we've got the line that goes all the way to Coquitlam Centre. We've got the line that's underway to Broadway and, at some point, on the way to UBC.

It reflects the work that's taken place by successive governments. No government does it all by itself. It's building on the work of its predecessors, and the work that we do today gets built on by governments that come in the future. That may be this government, it could be a different government in the future, but it's building this province where we are working together on a shared vision.

It's my hope that this throne speech lays out that shared vision as to how we move forward to deal with the threats that we are facing in terms of the tariffs and the threats that we are facing from what we thought was a partner that we could always rely on, that we did not have to worry about. The reality is that we do.

It means addressing internal trade barriers within the country. This province has already indicated a desire to do that. The Premier has been working very much with other Premiers and saying: "Okay, how do we deal with that?" We have a government that set up a tariff committee, chaired by the Minister of Housing and Municipal Affairs, to look at what mechanisms need to be in place.

How do we take the lessons that we learnt in COVID, where we were able to get a number of things done? I reflect on some of the changes that we managed to do in areas in my previous ministry portfolio that we got through very quickly — requested by business, put in place, and still there today, because they succeeded.

[5:05 p.m.]

It was that collaboration between government, business, labour and Indigenous people that allowed those things to happen. Some of them may seem quite small, but the reality is that for those businesses impacted, they're pretty important.

The ones on the alcohol file, for example, the issue around the patios and extending the patios. Restaurants and pubs have been asking for that for a long time through successive governments, whether they were on the left of the spectrum, the right of the spectrum, the centre.

It took COVID. It took COVID, and it took government recognizing there are times and opportunities and moments that allow us to make changes and to take action that will benefit all of us for the long term. That was one of the areas. It was a small area, but it's still there today.

There are pubs and restaurants I see when I drive by in my own community. In the summer, people are out enjoying themselves. These are things that were talked about for ages, but it took a crisis to make that happen. It shouldn't always do that, but the reality is that too often that's the case.

Well, we are at that moment now again where we have the opportunity to be able to make changes that can speed up projects, that can remove obstacles for opportunity to help grow our economy that can provide the revenue that we need to provide the services that people rely on, services — whether it is health care, whether it is education, child care — that families rely on.

The world has changed since 1969. Child care programs have allowed more women into the workforce than ever before. The child care programs that we have put in place have allowed women into the workforce to assist supporting families, particularly at times such as now when we've seen affordability and affordability issues.

The reforms that we made around ICBC, for example, have allowed for lower insurance rates, have allowed for rebates, have allowed to assist families, again, on the issues of affordability. Those things are very much focused on in the throne speech.

How do we continue to do that? How do we protect the jobs that are under threat? How do we protect the jobs that are under threat from the tariffs south of the border? We don't know what we're operating with, when we come to the individual in the White House, other than uncertainty, changes and, as I said a few moments ago, a disrespect to their strongest friend and their greatest trading partner.

That's why this throne speech is so important. This throne speech tables the government's path forward because it lays out that path of how we're going to deal with that. The idea that we would be looking at a situation where tariffs, whether it's 25 percent tariffs that were initially proposed…. And then said: "Oh, we'll delay for 30 days." You know, in those 30 days, that clock is ticking down. But in the meantime: "Oh, let's set the tariffs at 25 percent on steel and aluminum."

The impact that has on British Columbia, and we are the province that is best positioned in terms of the diversity of trade that has taken place compared to the other provinces, is unbelievable. It's not just the tariff itself that causes the problems and causes that damage; it's that uncertainty. It's that decision that people make on whether to invest. It's the decision of whether they look at going: "Do I make that investment here? Do I make it somewhere else, or do I just park it and not do it?"

The idea that we could see 140,000 people in this province lose their jobs because of the capriciousness of somebody in the White House is something that this government is not prepared to stand idly by and let happen. Nor is this country prepared to stand by and let it happen, be-

cause the damage to British Columbia is significant in the loss of those jobs.

[5:10 p.m.]

The loss of jobs and the damage to the economy of this country in the major manufacturing centres in Ontario…. For all that we sometimes like to knock eastern Canada, especially during hockey games, if the Leafs are playing…. The reality is that the Windsor-Montreal corridor is still home to 70 percent of the population in this country. The economic output from that is enormous.

The damage to our economy from those tariffs will be felt right across this country, putting us into a recession that hurts every single Canadian, that hurts British Columbians, and it's that uncertainty that lasts for a long time.

Recovering from that damage does not happen overnight, which is why the Team Canada approach has been taken: that it doesn't matter whether you're an NDP government in British Columbia, a Conservative government in Ontario, a nationalist government in Quebec. All are sending the same message, all working to lobby the decision-makers in the U.S., in those key states, ensuring that we are making and have ready-to-go, targeted, reciprocal tariffs, if that's what it comes down to, if they go ahead.

Americans understand that we did not start this fight. Your President started this fight, but we will not back down, because at the end of the day, we are Canadians first and foremost and always will be.

We moved to Montreal in 1967. We moved from the U.K. I don't think I've ever been able to say I have been more proud to be Canadian, more grateful for my parents to have made that decision, to come to what is absolutely the most amazing place. We are the second-largest nation on earth. We are the most peaceable nation.

I remember when we came out to B.C. We drove, my father in the station wagon with five kids in the back of that station wagon. I was nine. My youngest brother was 18 months. My parents, in five days, drove all the way across to British Columbia.

[The Speaker in the chair.]

I can honestly say that it is an incredible drive. You watch, and as a kid, you're going, "Are we there yet? Are we there yet?" as you go across Northern Ontario, which goes forever, and then speed across the prairies, and then you're in B.C. I cannot think of a better part of the country I want to live.

I cannot think of a better community that I would want to represent than the community that it has been a privilege to represent for eight terms. It's a very special place.

Also, to be an MLA…. Whether it has been in the opposition or as part of a government, we're committed to ensuring that British Columbians are treated fairly. They have a government that recognizes that the services that they depend on need to be in place, that the services that help their families are there for them when they need it and that the supports in times of trouble are there for them when they need it.

In this moment in time, we have a government that is fighting not just for them, but for our province and our country. I am really, really pleased about supporting this throne speech. I'll just close with one final thing that I meant to mention at the beginning, in fact, was going to save for another day.

[5:15 p.m.]

I know one of the most important issues right now for a segment of my community is Hazel Trembath School. It's a school that burnt down, and what I can tell you is that in my capacity as MLA, that is my number one priority to accomplish for my riding, for my community, the Hazel Trembath community on Citadel Heights. I'm working very hard on that, and I am optimistic about some positive news on that in the near future.

That will join a list of accomplishments and initiatives that I have been a part of in terms of my riding over so many years, whether it's been the replacement of the Red Bridge that got knocked down one night by a drunk driver and stayed in place for not quite 20 years — we got that rebuilt; or the courthouse decision, to move the courthouse to downtown Port Coquitlam, which really helped with the rejuvenation of my community. There's a lot that I'm proud of.

There's a lot more work to do. I want to take this opportunity once again to thank the incredible people of Port Coquitlam, the mayor and the council that I've worked with, the school trustees that I've worked with, because it is, as I said, an amazing community.

With that, I can see you're looking at me, going: am I going to move adjournment of debate? I'm not sure if somebody on the other side is going to speak now, or are they going to speak on the Monday?

Interjection.

Hon. Mike Farnworth: Okay, in that case, having completed my remarks….

Hon. Mike Farnworth moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. Mike Farnworth moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

The Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 10 a.m. Monday.

The House adjourned at 5:17 p.m.

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