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(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 12, 2015
Afternoon Sitting
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THE HONOURABLE STEVE THOMSON, SPEAKER

ISSN

PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Entered Confederation July 20, 1871)

LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR

Her Honour the Honourable Judith Guichon, OBC

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Honourable Steve Thomson

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 Beare, Lisa (NDP)Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows
 Begg, Garry (NDP)Surrey-Guildford
 Bernier, Mike (BC Liberal)Peacer River South
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 Chouhan, Raj (NDP)Burnaby-Edmonds
 Chow, George (NDP)Vancouver-Fraserview
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 Coleman, Rich (BC Liberal)Langley East
 Conroy, Katrina (NDP)Kootenay West
 D'Eith, Bob (NDP)Maple Ridge-Mission
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 Olsen, Adam (Green)Saanich North & the Islands
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 Plecas, Darryl (BC Liberal)Abbotsford South
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 Abbotsford WestMichael de Jong
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 Burnaby Lougheed.....Katrina Chen
 Burnaby North.....Janet Routledge
 Burnaby-Deer LakeAnne Kang
 Cariboo ChilcotinDonna Barnett
 Cariboo NorthCoralee Oakes
 ChilliwackJohn Martin
 Chilliwack KentLaurie Throness
 Columbia River-RevelstokeDoug Clovechok
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 Coquitlam-Burke MountainJoan Isaacs
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 Cowichan ValleySonia Furstenau
 Delta NorthRavi Kahlon
 Delta South.....Ian Paton
 Esquimalt MetchosinMitzi Dean
 Fraser NicolaJackie Tegart
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 Kamloops-South ThompsonTodd Stone
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 Kelowna WestChristie Clark
 Kelowna-Lake CountryNorm Letnick
 Kootenay EastTom Shypitka
 Kootenay WestKatrina Conroy
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 Langley.....Mary Polak
 Langley EastRich Coleman
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 Maple Ridge-Pitt MeadowsLisa Beare
 Mid Island-Pacific RimScott Fraser
 NanaimoLeonard Krog
 Nanaimo-North CowichanDoug Routley
 Nechako LakesJohn Rustad
 Nelson CrestonMichelle Mungall
 New WestminsterJudy Darcy
 North Coast.....Jennifer Rice
 North IslandClaire Trevena
 North Vancouver-LonsdaleBowinn Ma
 North Vancouver-SeymourJane Thornthwaite
 Oak Bay-Gordon HeadAndrew Weaver
 Parksville Qualicum.....Michelle Stilwell
 Peacer River SouthDan Davies
 Peacer River SouthMike Bernier
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 Port CoquitlamMike Farnworth
 Port Moody-CoquitlamRick Glumac
 Powell River-Sunshine CoastNicholas Simons
 Prince George-MackenzieMike Morris
 Prince George-Valemount.....Shirley Bond
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 Richmond Queensborough.....Jas Johal
 Richmond South Centre.....Linda Reid
 Richmond StevestonJohn Yap
 Saanich North & the IslandsAdam Olsen
 Saanich SouthLana Popham
 ShuswapGreg Kylo
 SkeenaEllis Ross
 StikineDoug Donaldson
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 Surrey Guildford.....Garry Begg
 Surrey NewtonHarry Bains
 Surrey PanoramaJinny Sims
 Surrey South.....Stephanie Cadieux
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 Surrey-White RockTracy Redies
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 Vancouver KensingtonMable Elmore
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 Vancouver QuilchenaAndrew Wilkinson
 Vancouver-False CreekSam Sullivan
 Vancouver-Mount PleasantMelanie Mark
 Vancouver-Point Grey.....David Eby
 Vancouver-West End.....Spencer Chandra Herbert
 Vernon MonasheeEric Foster
 Victoria-Beacon HillCarole James
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 West Vancouver-CapilanoRalph Sultan
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THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2015

The House met at 1:32 p.m.

[Madame Speaker in the chair.]

Routine Business

Introductions by Members

Hon. P. Fassbender: Tuesday was Safer Internet Day in the province, and this year's theme was "Let's create a better Internet together." I'm proud to say that we have some amazing young people that are in the precinct today who have been working with us in the government and the Ministry of Education under our ERASE Bullying strategy. They're part of our student advisory group.

They come from every part of the province: Williams Lake, Cowichan Bay, Tumbler Ridge, Haida Gwaii, Ladysmith, Kaslo and many other great towns in this great province. They're advising the Ministry of Education on bullying and other student safety issues. They're close to releasing B.C.'s first provincial social media guidelines to help students, parents and educators use social media ethically and responsibly.

These students are taking ownership of their on-line actions and inspiring others to do the same. I'd ask the House to join me in welcoming them into the precinct.

G. Heyman: We spend many hours in this Legislature talking about training and skills development, particularly for First Nations people. It's my pleasure today to introduce a couple of guests in the precinct, one of whom is an old friend of mine and many people on this side of the House.

Karen Abramsen, from Kelowna, is program manager with the Okanagan Training and Development Council. She is here with Joseph Pierre, who is a board member of the council, from the Penticton Indian Band. They're meeting with colleagues from across the province as well as with people from Service Canada, who are working hard on the issues and in the field of aboriginal employment and training.

Will the members please join me in making our guests feel very welcome.

Hon. N. Letnick: Joining us in the member's gallery this afternoon is a delegation from the German Bundestag, Germany's parliament.

[1335]

The head of the delegation is Mr. Klaus-Peter Flosbach. He's also with fellow members of the German Bundestag — Mr. Alexander Ulrich, Dr. Tobias Lindner, Mr. Markus Koob, Mr. Oswin Veith and Mr. Michael Thews — who are members of the German-Canadian

Parliamentary Friendship Group.

They're accompanied by Mr. Hermann Sitz, a good friend of mine and also consul general of the Federal Republic of Germany in Vancouver, and Mr. Bertram Dierkes-Leitfeld, deputy consul general. I'll be meeting with them this afternoon to discuss trade and other relations between British Columbia and Germany.

Would the House please make them feel very welcome.

L. Reimer: It's a great pleasure to introduce a very special person in my life, my wonderful mother, Norma Chambers, who has spent the past week here with me in Victoria. We've managed to have a few meals together. Would the House please join me in a warm welcome for her.

Tributes

DYLAN ARMSTRONG

Hon. T. Lake: Six and a half years ago at the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics Dylan Armstrong, of Kamloops, came within one centimetre of a bronze medal in the shot put. To have come so close to the podium after years of daily training at the expense of so many of life's other activities was heartbreaking for Dylan.

Yet the world witnessed a remarkable young man who showed no trace of bitterness, giving one of the most gracious sports interviews that I have ever seen. Dylan thanked his family, his coach and his hometown of Kamloops for all of the support during his journey to the top echelon of athletics.

As we know, at the top echelon sometimes it can be tainted by those who don't follow the rules. As it turns out, the athlete awarded the bronze medal that day was disqualified. This Sunday at the Tournament Capital Centre in Kamloops our great Dylan Armstrong will have an Olympic medal for shot put placed around his very large neck. I hope the House will join me in congratulating him.

Introductions by Members

G. Kylo: It gives me great pleasure to introduce some guests, some constituents from my riding. We have Donna Lahota and Nathan Goebel. Donna's claim to fame is that her brother was a former mayor of Sicamous. Even more importantly, her cousin is Lorne Mayencourt, former MLA, whose office I now share.

With Donna is her daughter Nicole, who's celebrating a birthday this next week and who resides in Langley. And a close friend and former business owner from Sicamous — we have Jean-Noel Robert.

Could the House please make them feel very welcome.

J. Rice: In the House today we have some guests from the Office of the Police Complaint Commissioner. I would like the House to make Stan Lowe and Rollie Woods welcome.

Madame Speaker: The member from Penticton.

D. Ashton: Madame Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity. I, too, would like to welcome Councillor Joseph Pierre from the Penticton Indian Band. I've had numerous occasions and the honour to work with him on numerous issues that the city of Penticton and the band face. Would the House please help me make him welcome here.

Hon. J. Rustad: Today is a special day. Today is the fourth anniversary of the moosehide campaign event, which sees aboriginal and non-aboriginal men standing up against violence and to end violence against aboriginal women and children. A number of people were out on the steps participating in this today, and a number are in the precinct here, hopefully, for question period today. I just wanted to introduce them.

Paul Lacerte with the aboriginal friendship centre was one of the driving forces behind this. Chief Robert Joseph, Jeremy Loveday, Saul Brown, Jeanette MacInnis, Chancellor Amos, Warren Claremont and Carl Mashon — these people are all pledging to help bring about an end to violence. Through this, many people are also fasting today. I am also participating in that fast today to help bring about an end to aboriginal violence.

What I would like is to, first of all, thank everybody in the House for wearing the moosehide today. Thank you for permission that we may wear it today. Also, if the House could please make them welcome.

[1340]

J. Horgan: Although they won't be officially assigned to a caucus until tomorrow, I want the House and those in the galleries to recognize a clutch of handsome young undergraduates, who are maybe looking at graduate studies, along with Dr. Paddy Smith. They will be the interns here at the Legislature in the coming spring session. I'll introduce them as follows: Emily Barner from the University of Victoria; Kathleen Bowers from the University of British Columbia; Corinne Brosz from the University of Northern British Columbia; Matthew Chan from McGill University and someone from away, perhaps; Jessica Giang from the University of British Columbia; Mark Levesque from Simon Fraser University; Sarah Marriott from Simon Fraser University; Kevin Sage from Simon Fraser University — I think there's a trend here; Kristine Parker from Simon Fraser University and Alissa Wrean from Wilfrid Laurier and the University of Victoria.

Would the House please make our new round of

fresh-faced interns very, very welcome.

Hon. A. Virk: I'd like to join with my colleague the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation to also welcome the fourth annual moosehide campaign event that occurred on the steps. In fact, I'm also joining my brothers who are fasting today in promoting an end to violence.

M. Dalton: I, too, am participating in the moosehide campaign and the fast. I just want to express my appreciation for the great work that Paul Lacerte at the aboriginal friendship centre is doing, putting a focus on violence against aboriginal women and children.

While I have the floor here, I do want to recognize a very special guest of mine, my valentine Marlene, my wife of 30 years, who's been a frequent guest here. She's just been a tremendous support to me. As members may be aware, I will be seeking the federal nomination for the riding of Pitt Meadows–Maple Ridge. I told Marlene that she has the last word, and she says we've got to do this. I'm not one to argue. Would the House please make her feel welcome.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

BILL 3 — BUILDING ACT

Hon. R. Coleman presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Building Act.

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

Motion approved.

Hon. R. Coleman: I am pleased to introduce the Building Act. The building construction sector is a major contributor to B.C.'s economy. This act will achieve three major goals: streamline the regulatory framework for construction; increase the competency of building officials by establishing minimum qualifications, as in other provinces; and continue to support the construction sector with local government while encouraging building innovations.

This act is a significant step forward for the construction sector in B.C.'s economy. It is strongly supported by industry stakeholders.

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

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

BILL 5 — GOVERNMENT INFORMATION ACT

Hon. A. Virk presented a message from Her Honour the Lieutenant-Governor: a bill intituled Government Information Act.

Hon. A. Virk: I move that Bill 5 be introduced and read a first time now.

Motion approved.

Hon. A. Virk: I am pleased to introduce the Government Information Act. This act will modernize and facilitate information management practices across government by, first of all, repealing the 1936 paper-era Document Disposal Act and moving to electronic storage of information. It will also establish a digital archives, which will provide on-line public access to government archival information.

In moving to electronic storage and archiving information, we'll be joining other leading jurisdictions in Canada, the U.S., the U.K. and Australia. Digitizing our information will make it easier to manage, retrieve and store, resulting in improved services for citizens, efficiencies and better use of taxpayer dollars, increased productivity and timely access to information, and better overall information management. In short, the Government Information Act will move British Columbia's information management practices into the digital age.

[1345]

On a final note, I move the bill be placed on the orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill 5, Government Information Act, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

MOOSEHIDE ANTI-VIOLENCE CAMPAIGN BY ABORIGINAL MEN

S. Fraser: Today, February 12, 2015, aboriginal and non-aboriginal men met for the fourth consecutive year here in Victoria to stand together to end violence towards aboriginal women and children. The moosehide campaign — its annual gathering of men took place at the Hotel Grand Pacific from 9 a.m. this morning till noon; the procession marched to the B.C. Legislature, and a press conference was held on the steps at 12:30 — is just to deal with the issue of violence against women and children.

In B.C. violence against women and children is an issue affecting all ethnicities and backgrounds, includ-

ing the infamous and tragic Highway of Tears. For B.C., the unfortunate reality is that the international community has taken notice. The UN report on murdered and missing indigenous women by the UN Inter-American Commission on Human Rights was just released recently. It focuses right here on B.C.

The moosehide campaign is calling on men across the country to stand up for those experiencing violence and to create an environment where it is safe to talk about the issue. The campaign is catching on across the country.

“Our goal is to re-shape our society to one where women are treated with love and respect at all times,” says Paul Lacerte, moosehide campaign founder and the executive director of the B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. He goes on to say: “The level of violence towards women in this country is shocking and totally unacceptable. We need to do more as men to support each other in our healing and also hold each other accountable for our actions. We need to stop taking a back seat on this issue and help drive the change together.”

I applaud them, and I applaud Paul. He is so right. We in this House need to be part of that solution and, as legislators, all of us held to account should we fail.

S. Gibson: Today members on both sides of the House are proud to be wearing a moosehide patch to show support for the moosehide campaign and what it stands for. The campaign, as we know now, is in its fourth year and was created by the B.C. Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres. As a matter of fact, I have one in my constituency.

The inspiration for the campaign comes from Paul Lacerte. One day he and his daughter Raven were hunting moose near Highway 16 up north when it suddenly occurred to Mr. Lacerte that Raven deserved to live in a world free of violence. He wants a world where all women and children have the right to feel safe within their own community or within the confines of their home. Now, three years later, over 20,000 pieces of hide have been distributed Canada-wide.

The movement is spreading. It supports “Violence-free B.C.,” our new long-term strategy to eliminate violence against women in this province.

Today I'm taking part in a one-day fast, a very simple act of sacrifice for men to signify their empathy for women who endure violence in their lives. Many other women are also fasting today to demonstrate the strength of their commitment.

Anyone can take part and be a part of the solution by simply standing up and saying that violence or abuse of any kind, be it physical or emotional, will not be tolerated. Let's take part fully in the moosehide campaign and create a world that Raven and so many other young people and women deserve, a world without fear and with-

out violence.

MUSIC AND TEACHING ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF MARK REID

S. Simpson: I'm pleased to be able to stand and celebrate Mark Reid, a remarkable teacher at Vancouver Technical Secondary School in Vancouver-Hastings. A music educator, Mark has been director of bands and choirs at Van Tech since 2006. This year he's been nominated for the Global Teacher Prize and has reached the shortlist of the final 50 teachers in contention. This global competition and the accompanying \$1 million prize to the winner seeks out the best teachers from around the world.

[1350]

Mark is one of three Canadians and the only British Columbian on the list. Recognition of his accomplishments is not new to Mark. In 2013 he was the MusiCounts Teacher of the Year. That award was presented to him at the Junos by Shania Twain. President of the Canadian Music Educators Association and past president of the British Columbia Music Educators Association, Mark is also a conductor at the Saint James Music Academy, teaching classical music at no cost to children living in Canada's lowest-income neighbourhoods.

Mark studied conducting at the University of British Columbia, earning admission to the Blue and Gold Circle and winning the Horning prize for most promising music educator. He has performed with the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra and is the music director for Carpe Ictus Music.

This is an impressive resumé of both accomplishments and recognition, but most important is his commitment day in and day out to the kids at Van Tech. He has motivated young people through music and created hope and opportunity for them to believe they can follow their dreams.

We all know there are many outstanding teachers in the public education system in British Columbia, teachers who every day go the extra mile to meet and exceed the needs of our children. Mark Reid is a shining example of that dedication and ability, and I'm very proud that he teaches young people in Vancouver-Hastings — a pride I know is shared by my colleague for Vancouver-Fairview who is Mark's MLA.

I ask all members of this House to thank Mark for his work, congratulate him on his accomplishments and wish him well in the competition to be named the No.1 teacher in the world.

WORK OF TZU CHI FOUNDATION IN BURNABY

R. Lee: A few days ago I had the opportunity to attend an event in Burnaby hosted by the Tzu Chi Foun-

ation of Canada. I was amazed by their wonderful work and contributions to the community of Burnaby, as well as worldwide countries. I would like to share their mission with all members in the House today.

The Tzu Chi Foundation is a global non-profit charity organization founded by Dharma Master Cheng Yen, a Buddhist nun, in 1966, while the Tzu Chi Foundation Canada was founded in 1992, aiming at inaugurating the good work of the global foundation.

The Tzu Chi Foundation Canada has delivered charitable and humanitarian services to 81 distinct projects in the past 23 years. Numerous communities, including my riding of Burnaby North, have benefited from the great work of the organization. For example, in supporting low-income families they have set up breakfast programs in four elementary schools and two secondary schools in Burnaby, providing a nutritious breakfast to the needy students in the school.

Moreover, their volunteers provide help in the Burnaby food bank by distributing food to the needy ones. They also participate in the hot meal service hosted by the Salvation Army and serving seniors at some senior homes, etc.

Meanwhile the organization is working with the aboriginal community to bring in acupuncture services to improve healthy living. Over the years, Tzu Chi Foundation volunteers have also assisted in fire and flood emergency relief in the province.

I am deeply touched by the Tzu Chi volunteers' passion, diligence and commitment in serving locally, as well as globally. May the House please join me in recognizing their great efforts and contributions throughout the years, and may we all learn from their selfless and humble hearts while serving our neighbours.

BREAKFAST SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM BY OUR PLACE SOCIETY

C. James: Today many of Victoria's vulnerable citizens woke up to the reality of living below the poverty line, not able to find affordable housing, struggling to pay their rent, buy groceries and trying to manage paycheque to paycheque. That often means no breakfast to start their day.

Our Place, an extraordinary organization in Victoria, has once again stepped up and answered that call. Generous local citizens and businesses have also stepped up to do their part. This initiative is called sponsor-a-breakfast, and it's a creative approach to delivering a nutritious hot breakfast for those who need it most. Pancakes, eggs, ham, potatoes, sausages, fruit and other hearty choices give people a good start to their day.

On an average morning the team at Our Place serves 400 meals. In the last year the demand has doubled, and a growing number of those coming for breakfast are the working poor — people who are employed and on the

brink of homelessness. Starting off the day with nutrition and community can have a huge influence on positive life changes.

[1355]

The sponsor-a-breakfast program engages businesses, community groups, schools, individuals and organizations. The Victoria Real Estate Board sponsored the entire month of October, and a different real estate company took on each day.

Other participants have included Ecole Victor Brodeur, the Victoria Grizzlies junior hockey club and Colliers International. Sponsoring a breakfast at Our Place is also a terrific way to mark a birthday or an anniversary, a great team-building exercise for groups and organizations that want to work together and give back in the community.

I want to say thank you. Thank you to all those who've donated their dollars and time to make a difference, and a particular thank-you to the dedicated staff and leaders at Our Place, who once again answered the demand in our community in encouraging nourishment, hope and belonging for all.

EATING DISORDER AWARENESS

J. Thornthwaite: Last week was National Eating Disorders Awareness Week, a time to educate Canadians about eating disorders and raise awareness of the resources available to those who are suffering.

Eating disorders are potentially life-threatening, complex mental illnesses. Anorexia nervosa and bulimia are two of the most common eating disorders, each with its own distinctive signs and symptoms. Anorexia has the highest mortality rate of any mental illness. However, eating disorders like anorexia are treatable, usually with a combination of therapies involving a number of different health care professionals, including counsellors, physicians and dietitians.

The focus of this year's Eating Disorders Awareness Week is encouraging an open, supportive dialogue so that we can help end the stigma and shame associated with eating disorders and help the one million Canadians, plus the many others, who struggle with unhealthy food and weight preoccupation. We must also emphasize the importance of early intervention and of recognizing the warning signs. Many symptoms are often overlooked, and getting help during the early stages significantly increases the likelihood of preventing a disorder and leads to a greater chance of full recovery.

This fiscal year it's anticipated that provincial health authorities will spend more than \$10 million on eating disorder services. Our provincial eating disorder plan addresses specialized support services at various levels and helps health authorities tailor services so that patients receive the right type and intensity of supports to meet their individual needs.

These are great services, and if you or someone you know may be suffering from an eating disorder, I encourage you to reach out and get help. Talk to someone. Contact your family doctor or the National Eating Disorder Information Centre and find out how you can access the help you need. When it comes to eating disorders, talking saves lives.

Oral Questions

TRANSLINK MANAGEMENT AND CEO COMPENSATION

J. Horgan: Hon. Speaker, as you will know and many in this House will know, families right across British Columbia are getting squeezed day by day by day, nickel-and-dimed to death by a government that continues to increase fees, continues to increase licences. But other people are doing pretty well — a small, small percentage. The top 2 percent, for example, will be getting \$236 million in tax cuts from the government later in the year.

We learned yesterday that at the urging of the minister the TransLink board fired their current CEO, Ian Jarvis, \$460,000 a year, and replaced him with Doug Allen, \$420,000 a year. And on the surface that would appear to be a good deal for taxpayers, a good deal for the travelling public. The problem is they didn't actually fire Mr. Jarvis. They didn't like his advice on Monday, but today on Thursday they're going to be paying him \$460,000 a year to advise the incoming CEO.

My question. While commuters are stuck in gridlock and transit users are left at the curb, how is it that the Minister of Transportation thinks it's a good idea to solve these problems by having two CEOs at TransLink?

Hon. T. Stone: Thank you very much to the Leader of the Opposition. Let me be clear where the government stands on this file. First, this government is....

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members.

[1400]

Hon. T. Stone: First, our government is committed to a yes vote in the upcoming plebiscite. Our government is committed to providing the people of Metro Vancouver with a say over any new taxes and fees that the mayors determine are necessary for expanding transit and transportation in the region. This government also supports the decision that the TransLink board made and the decision that the Mayors Council supported yesterday to ensure that there is the strongest possible management at TransLink that there possibly can be in the years ahead.

Madame Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition on a supplemental.

J. Horgan: I'm so delighted that the minister chose to be clear today on his government's position with respect to the TransLink referendum, a referendum that was promised by the Premier during the election campaign. Even though there's overwhelming consensus within Metro Vancouver about how to address the challenges at TransLink, it was just this week that the minister discovered that we should remove the management that we put in place and replace that management — but not really — so that we can get to the bottom of the challenges at TransLink.

It strikes me that the people that are on the side of the road as the buses leave them behind — and the people that are banging their hips on the tollgates that don't work, \$300 million worth — are a little bit concerned that we now have a million dollars' worth of CEO and they're still being left at the side of the road.

Will the minister be clear to the people of B.C. and exercise what anyone would see as common sense — only have one CEO mismanaging TransLink at a time, not two?

Hon. T. Stone: If the members opposite are truly committed to a success in this plebiscite, what would be really useful would be for the members opposite to clarify where they stand.

The member for Vancouver-Fairview, who happens to be the opposition critic for TransLink, one year ago said, in a number of media interviews: "This referendum has no hope of passing." Then a year later he suddenly finds religion on this plebiscite, and he decides to support it. "Let's get out there, and let's support it." Now he's out there suggesting that he doesn't support the TransLink decision — and the decision of mayors, by the way — to ensure that TransLink has the best possible management it can possibly have, moving forward.

Hon. Speaker, I don't know about you, but I think that the people of the Lower Mainland are pretty darned confused and would appreciate some clarity. Maybe the member for Burnaby-Deer Lake could also let us know if she supports the mayor of Burnaby's position on this plebiscite. There are all kinds of mixed messages coming from the other side.

Madame Speaker: Recognizing the Leader of the Opposition on a further supplemental.

J. Horgan: As you know, I'm the member for Juan de Fuca here on Vancouver Island. I will not be able to vote on the referendum, but I understand that the member for Westside-Kelowna, who lives in Vancouver, will. So that's a good thing. You know that there's one Liberal who will be voting in favour of it.

I appreciate that the government would see two heads being better than one, but two paycheques for just one head doesn't make a whole lot of sense to the people who are being stuck in congestion. The economy is being constrained. People are hurting day after day after day. They pick up their paper today, and when they get on the SkyTrain — after they bump their hips on the tollgates that don't work — they learn that they're being paid a million bucks to be mismanaged.

Will the minister call on the TransLink board to do two things? Firstly, fire Mr. Jarvis. Don't just move him down the hall. And the second thing, tender their resignations, and let's deal with the governance challenges that have bedevilled this place since you took power.

[1405]

Hon. T. Stone: Clearly, the Leader of the Opposition either has not recently read the act where the governance model is actually laid out in detail, or he's choosing, for the purposes of question period, to kind of gloss over what the facts really are with respect to how the governance works.

Interjections.

Madame Speaker: Members, Members.

Hon. T. Stone: The board of TransLink is comprised of appointees that are approved by the Mayors Council. The Mayors Council actually has two seats on the board, including, at the present time, two very active participants: the mayor of Vancouver and the mayor of Surrey. They are both full-fledged participants of the TransLink board.

They are the ones, in concert with their other mayor colleagues, who are responsible for the operations and management of TransLink. For the hon. member to suggest anything otherwise betrays a fundamental lack of understanding about how the governance works at TransLink.

ACCESS TO FAMILY PHYSICIANS

J. Darcy: In 2010 the government promised that every British Columbian would have access to a family doctor by 2015. That was the GP for Me program, and the Premier recommitted to doing this in the 2013 election. Well, here we are. It's 2015. Does every British Columbian have access to a family doctor? Not even close. Hundreds of thousands of people are having to line up at walk-in clinics for their basic medical care. If they don't get in, if their number doesn't come up, where do they go? They end up in the emergency room.

The medical services tax has doubled in this province since the Liberals came to power. Even though people are paying more, they are getting less.

Can the Minister of Health explain why this government has failed to live up to its promise that every British Columbian would have a general practitioner in the year 2015?

Hon. T. Lake: I want to take this opportunity, first of all, to thank the member for the question. It gives me an opportunity to point out that the Conference Board of Canada has named British Columbia the top province in health delivery and health performance in Canada and No. 3 in the world. The top three in the world. I know the member opposite does a very good job and is aspiring to be in the top three on the other side of the House. I think she should be in the top three, like British Columbia.

The fact is that British Columbia is training over twice as many physicians as was the case in the 1990s. We have more doctors per capita than at any other time in our history. The reality is that the type of practice has changed. We need to change with the times, and we are doing that with the divisions of family practice connecting patients to long-term, continuous care from family practitioners. We'll continue to do that very good work.

Madame Speaker: Recognizing the member for New Westminster on a supplemental.

J. Darcy: This is surely a first in question period — the Minister of Health going back to the record of the NDP government in the 1990s. We've had the best health outcomes in Canada since 1993. The fact is that we exercise more, we smoke less and we drink less, and that's a credit to British Columbians. Absolutely it is.

The other fact is that today hundreds of thousands of British Columbians don't have a family doctor. According to the Auditor General, the ministry doesn't even know how many people this affects, because they're not even tracking it.

[1410]

How can the minister defend this government's health record when they have failed in their most basic promise? So 2010, 2013 — hundreds of thousands of British Columbians don't have a family doctor. How can the government defend that record?

Hon. T. Lake: I find it interesting that members of the opposition would talk about the lack of physicians when not one extra doctor was trained in the 1990s. If that action had happened in the 1990s.... We would have 1,000 more physicians in the province of British Columbia if they didn't try to limit the supply of physicians being trained in the province of British Columbia in the 1990s.

The divisions of family practice are working very closely, through the divisions of family practice, on the GP for Me program. We're making great progress

attaching patients to long-term care with their family practitioners. We are employing nurse practitioners around the province, designing primary health care for the needs of today and for tomorrow's British Columbians.

ACCESS TO FAMILY PHYSICIANS IN FORT ST. JOHN

J. Rice: For people in Fort St. John, it's even harder to find a family doctor. Last year seven doctors announced they would close their family practices. There were already 18,000 people without family doctors. Now there are 24,000 without. The government has told people in Fort St. John that their region is important, but they've done nothing to ensure important services are there.

Like everyone else in this province, people in Fort St. John are paying for this government's hikes in medical services tax, and they're getting less. Why is this government ignoring the crisis care being faced by the people of Fort St. John?

Hon. T. Lake: Well, first of all, it was this government that built a \$350 million hospital in Fort St. John.

We recognize that it is a challenge in some parts of the province to attract the health care professionals needed. I want to thank and recognize the member from North Peace for his efforts, working with the community, with the mayor of Fort St. John, with the divisions of family practice, with Northern Health.

The community has wrapped themselves around this challenge of attracting physicians and other health care professionals to their community. They've made great strides with a walk-in clinic and a non-attached clinic. There are more doctors that are set to come to Fort St. John this year, and we've created three nurse practitioner spaces to help with that challenge as well. There's a lot of good work being done in Fort St. John.

Madame Speaker: I recognize the member for North Coast on a supplemental.

J. Rice: I'd like to remind the minister that the fancy, expensive hospital he speaks about in Fort St. John is filled with seniors that should be in a long-term care facility, not a hospital.

Lee Taylor lives in Fort St. John. He is a senior with COPD, emphysema and lung cancer. He is on oxygen, and he has no doctor. It takes Lee five to six weeks to even get into a clinic just for a simple medication change. If he wants to see one sooner, he has to call an ambulance. Does the minister agree that the situation in Fort St. John needs to be addressed now — and make sure people like Lee Taylor have a doctor?

Hon. T. Lake: I wouldn't characterize the hospital in Fort St. John as fancy. It is a state-of-the-art, modern hospital to serve that community.

[1415]

There are people in Fort St. John working very diligently to address the challenge of attracting health care professionals to that community. A lot of work is, in fact, going on. If the member would like to travel to Fort St. John and meet with the mayor and the community members that have been so active in making sure that this problem was addressed, she would learn that.

Rural health care is a challenge in every jurisdiction across Canada. British Columbia has more rural physicians per capita than any other province. We're working hard to make sure the communities that need those health care professionals get those health care professionals.

GOVERNMENT ACTION ON HOMELESSNESS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A. Weaver: Victoria's Coalition to End Homelessness estimates that it costs about \$25,500 a year to maintain a shelter bed in the capital regional district. On the other hand, the cost to run new supportive housing is only about \$16,700 per unit per year. The costs of providing additional rental supplements, including support, is even lower, at \$6,800 per unit annually.

The evidence is clear. Since Utah launched its homelessness reduction strategy, a strategy that involved — you guessed it — giving homes to the homeless, they've reduced chronic homelessness by 72 percent, and they've saved an average of \$8,000 per person in health, social and justice system costs.

The same is true elsewhere. For example, the Canadian Observatory on Homelessness calculated that for each dollar spent on housing and supports for the chronically homeless, about \$2 in savings is found in health, social and justice services.

The Minister of Finance recently announced that there's more than a \$444 million surplus in this past year's budget. My question to the Minister Responsible for Housing is this. Will the government commit to using the one-time budget surplus to make capital investments in housing in order to reduce ongoing operating commitments in health, social and justice systems?

Hon. R. Coleman: Thanks to the member opposite for the question. I'm always happy to get up and actually talk about housing in this House, which is seldom, because we don't usually ask these questions. The fact of the matter is that in British Columbia we are home to the most successful housing strategy in Canadian history, right here in British Columbia.

In the last five years alone over 6,000 people that were

formerly homeless in this province are no longer homeless because of the outreach workers, the money that's been invested and the people being connected to housing and supports by our people across the province.

We've purchased over 50 buildings across the province of B.C. and renovated for housing and have also spent over half a billion dollars, just in the last couple of years, in building additional housing supports for people. In addition to that, we also today, in total, have 100,000 households in British Columbia that receive some form of support in their housing in British Columbia.

There are today 27,000-plus families in households receiving rent assistance where they live, in communities across British Columbia. The budget for housing has tripled in the last number of years simply because of the commitment of this government to the success of dealing with homelessness, mental health and addiction.

Madame Speaker: Oak Bay—Gordon Head on a supplemental.

A. Weaver: I recognize that this is not answer period, but my question was not about what the government has done. My question is about what the government will do in the future.

The reality is that recent analysis showed the least affordable cities in the world were Hong Kong and Vancouver. In fact, in the top five in Canada, four of them were in B.C.: Victoria, Kelowna, Fraser Valley, Vancouver. They're all in the top five. Toronto is the only one that wasn't.

The reality is that if you're living on income assistance, you're getting a total of \$375 as your housing allowance, whereas the average person on income assistance is paying \$501 in Victoria. If a landlord were to actually follow the rental tenancy office allowable rents, rents could have increased 30 percent since 2007, the time that this rental income assistance has remained fixed from.

The evidence is very clear. The costs of inaction are simply greater than the costs of action.

I reiterate my question. When will the government commit to (a) increasing that shelter allowance and dealing with British Columbia's homelessness problem, and (b) providing more affordable housing to actually deal with this problem, which is a tax on our social, health and other justice systems?

[1420]

Hon. R. Coleman: To the member opposite, the B.C. Housing budget for capital is actually pretty good for the next number of fiscal years. It has continuously been put in the three-year fiscal plan as we sit down and work with communities like Victoria, identify sites like we have in Victoria for three buildings that we've recent-

ly done and other buildings we've bought and renovated, partnerships that we do with the non-profit sector in order to be able to connect that sector in to being there for the people whose housing they're going to operate.

I'm happy actually.... To the member opposite, if you want to come and have a visit, we can actually explore some of your ideas. One thing I do know, when we wrote the housing strategy in 2005 — which is, by the way, again the most successful one in this country — we opened it up to being open to ideas.

The whole idea around it was that if we actually saw something in Portland or Utah or somewhere else and we thought it could work here in British Columbia, we were not disinclined at all, in our minds, to steal a good idea that might help the citizens of this province. That's why the housing ministry, B.C. Housing, has such a dynamic mandate, in order to go out and look for their solutions on behalf of B.C. citizens.

FUNDING FOR INVESTIGATIONS INTO MISSING AND MURDERED WOMEN ALONG HIGHWAY 16

M. Karagianis: In 2012 the member for Prince George–Valemount, who was then the Justice Minister, said that the project E-PANA investigation into missing and murdered women along the Highway of Tears had “government's full support.” However, just two years later the B.C. Liberal government cut the E-PANA project by 84 percent.

I'd like to know: is this how the B.C. Liberal government shows its support, by hampering the ability of investigators to solve these horrible crimes?

Hon. S. Anton: The issue of missing and murdered women in British Columbia has been a priority for this government for some years now. That, of course, includes solving the murders and missing women along Highway 16, the E-PANA investigation. That's why government committed money to the RCMP a number of years ago to set up a task force, which was set up. It was a very extensive task force, a massive amount of work done.

The work continues. The investigations continue within major crimes of RCMP. They continue because the RCMP is extraordinarily committed to the families to solving these murders. This is an issue that must be solved — I agree with the member opposite — and that sentiment is shared by the RCMP. They continue to work very hard on these cases every single day.

Madame Speaker: Esquimalt–Royal Roads on a supplemental.

M. Karagianis: That makes no sense at all. The government has cut the funding by 84 percent. The RCMP

themselves have said to the government: “...no other Highway of Tears historical homicide investigations being undertaken for the foreseeable future.” They have told the government — an 84 percent cut means no more investigations.

I would like to know from the Justice Minister how letting people who have committed murders go free in this province is a way to have a violence-free British Columbia?

Hon. S. Anton: The RCMP budget last year was increased by \$5 million. The RCMP has a major crimes division. The major crimes division looks after many things, but including historical murders and investigations.

I've spoken to the deputy commissioner on this file. I know from what the RCMP tell me and from what the deputy commissioner tells me and from what I observe that they are extremely committed to continuing to work with the families along Highway 16 to solve these unsolved murders. It is a priority of the RCMP. It's a priority of government. It has been, and it remains so.

S. Fraser: An 84 percent cut does not jibe with what the Attorney is saying.

[1425]

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights report into missing and murdered aboriginal women in B.C. confirmed that there are more unsolved cases here than in any other province in Canada. It said that government must offer “judicial remedies for victims and their family members when they suffer acts of violence.”

The families of women murdered along the Highway of Tears have suffered for way too long. Will the Justice Minister commit today to reversing cuts to E-PANA so those families can finally get justice?

Hon. S. Anton: As I said a moment ago, the budget of the RCMP last year increased. The major crimes unit works hard every single day. The RCMP themselves are extremely committed to solving these issues, solving these historical murder files. They work closely with the families. They are committed to this file. They have a major crimes division that works on these files. This is a commitment of the RCMP. It has been, as I said, and it remains so.

IMPLEMENTATION OF MISSING WOMEN INQUIRY RECOMMENDATIONS AND BUS SERVICE ON HIGHWAY 16

S. Fraser: Just wearing the moosehide doesn't make the problem go away. Platitudes don't make the problem go away. Both the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry and the Inter-American Commission said that women along the Highway of Tears were being put at

risk because of the lack of safe, affordable alternatives to hitchhiking, for instance. That's why the Missing Women Commission urged this government to act immediately to "develop and implement an enhanced public transportation system and provide a safer travel option for northern communities."

Again to the minister: when will these communities get the shuttle service that was recommended years ago?

Hon. T. Stone: As the Attorney has stated, I think very clearly, on numerous occasions inside and outside of this House, this government is committed to the recommendations in the missing-women report, including the recommendation to identify safer transportation options. That is why last summer staff from the Ministry of Transportation actually spent the better part of a month meeting with all kinds of organizations — First Nations, about 80 First Nations leaders, and municipal leaders — up along the Highway 16 corridor to talk about this challenge of safe transportation options.

I think that fundamentally, there is no easy fix in terms of the often-suggested bus service. But I'll tell you there were some very good suggestions that were made, some very good ideas that were thrown on the table. A number of those we actually announced before Christmas and we've actually implemented. They include a new web portal that makes it much, much easier for people who live in the area to learn about the variety of transportation options that do exist along the corridor. All of that information is now consolidated into one place.

In addition, this government has provided \$75,000 to Carrier-Sekani Family Services for driver education, safe driver and driver licensing programs for First Nations.

These are some of the steps that we have implemented to ensure that folks along the Highway 16 corridor have safer transportation options.

[End of question period.]

Reports from Committees

J. Martin: I have the honour to present the report of the Special Committee to Appoint a Police Complaint Commissioner. I move that the report be taken as read and received.

Motion approved.

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

Leave granted.

J. Martin: I move that the report be adopted.

Motion approved.

J. Martin: I ask leave of the House to move a further motion to reappoint Stan T. Lowe as Police Complaint Commissioner.

Leave granted.

Motions Without Notice

APPOINTMENT OF POLICE COMPLAINT COMMISSIONER

J. Martin: I move that:

[Pursuant to the *Police Act* (RSBC 1996, c.367), and the *Police (Police Complaint Commissioner) Amendment Act*, 2009, Stan T. Lowe be re-appointed as Police Complaint Commissioner for a term of four years commencing March 1, 2015.]

In moving this motion, I would like to provide a brief profile of the candidate unanimously selected by the committee.

[1430]

Mr. Lowe is currently B.C.'s Police Complaint Commissioner, a position he has held since February 2009. Mr. Lowe is currently a lawyer and holds a law degree from the University of British Columbia. He has an extensive background in criminal law and management, including a legal career in private practice and with B.C.'s major crimes prosecution unit and the criminal justice branch of the Ministry of Justice, where he was a senior member of the branch's management team from 2005 to 2009.

Since 2009 he has provided leadership to the office of the Police Complaint Commissioner, improving the management and practices of the office while enhancing its relations with police agencies, community stakeholders and citizens. His work and his achievements as Police Complaint Commissioner and his previous service in prosecution and management make him well qualified to continue to lead the office of the Police Complaint Commissioner.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to the Deputy Chair, the member for North Coast, along with the committee members for their hard work and dedication. I'm pleased the committee was able to work collaboratively and was able to unanimously recommend Mr. Lowe's reappointment.

J. Rice: I just, too, wanted to add that it was a pleasure working with our Chair and that I very much appreciated being on this committee. We look forward to working with Stan going forward.

Motion approved.

Tabling Documents

Hon. S. Anton: I have the honour to present the Crown Proceeding Act report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2014.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: Continued debate on the throne speech.

Throne Speech Debate

[D. Horne in the chair.]

Deputy Speaker: I recognize the member for Cowichan Valley, and I ask those members that are leaving the chamber for other duties to please make certain that the member for Cowichan Valley is heard.

B. Routley: Just to quickly review where we were, we were continuing in our discussion about the kind of jig-gery-pokery that goes on with the Liberal government that continues to this day, I can assure you. You'll see the evidence for that in just a minute here.

One of the problems that this government has is a reliance model, a professional reliance model, wherein they relied on the proponent, their expert, in doing something like dumping contaminated soil in the watershed in our beautiful Shawnigan Lake region. For the good people of Shawnigan Lake, I just want to read into the record what the government actually had the audacity to say in their throne speech, because they'll be very interested and very disturbed at the same time.

I quote, under the heading "The Environment" in the throne speech, it says: "B.C. will continue to lead on responsible economic development by continuing..." Imagine this, people in the Shawnigan region, where they're continuing to dump contaminated soil. They're saying they're going to continue "to protect our clean air, our clean water and our land." Just the opposite is what's going on in the Shawnigan Lake region.

They also carry on here with: "We will continue to provide a positive example to the world that there is no need to choose between economic growth and fighting climate change."

[1435]

What fight on climate change? Ask the good people in the Cowichan Valley region what's going on with the river and the fact that we continue to run out of water and actually have to truck fish up the river. Five times in the last ten years this has gone on, with the help of volunteers, to rescue the iconic salmon in what is known as a B.C. heritage river from being decimated by a drought.

Why? It's because this government knows — they've seen the record — that there are continual climate

change impacts, continually dwindling water supplies. Yet they have not been, and refuse to be involved in, developing a fulsome plan of action.

Now, where I left off we were reviewing one of the.... This is the professional reliance that the Minister of Environment relied on. Just think about this for a minute. They actually relied on a group that is now owed.... It came out as evidence, under the Environmental Appeal Board, that the company, the proponent, South Island Aggregates, owes Active Earth \$540,000. They made this admission that they actually owe more than half a million dollars.

They certainly are owed that based on the success of whether or not this thing goes ahead. So the proponent has a monetary reason. Of course, this raised many questions about the reliability of Active Earth's reports. They had given, and had, considerable financial ties to the proponent of the contaminated site and a vested interest in the outcome of the permitting process.

That's a serious matter, in my opinion. It was impossible to condense the 32 days of hearings, but some of the most pertinent details were highlighted during the closing argument. I just want to go over some of what was put forward in the closing argument put to the Environmental Appeal Board. This is relevant to what we're talking about — clean air, clean water — that was part of the throne speech.

"Most importantly, the experts who testified were unanimous in their concern about the location of this proposed contaminated soil site. It became glaringly clear that this is indeed a wholly inappropriate site for this type of dump and that the contaminants would present a clear risk, not just to the environment but to the long-term safety of the drinking water." This is dumping arsenic, all kinds of health risks to the community, as a result of this toxic brew that they're planning on dumping.

"It also became clear that in the process of granting the permit, the protocols for selecting this site for contaminated soil were wilfully overlooked and ignored."

Secondly, the statutory decision-maker, or SDM, for the Ministry of Environment clearly was derelict in his duties. Now, can you imagine this? "Not only did he not once visit the site before issuing the permit in August 2013; he neglected a significant number of his responsibilities, as outlined in the ministry's statutory decision-maker handbook" — which, of course, he was taken through by the lawyers.

They asked him: "Did you do this? Did you do that?" The answer was that he didn't follow the handbook that he, as statutory decision-maker, ought to have to thoroughly review, you would think, in something as important as this.

"Some of the responsibilities that he did not fulfil included ensuring that the process was transparent, consistent and fair; having in-depth knowledge and spe-

cialized expertise; consulting with First Nations.” The Minister of Environment’s designate did not even respond to the Cowichan Tribes’ opposition to this proposal.

It’s clear, when you look at the list of experts and their analysis and reports, that the government was relying on a flawed process with people that had a monetary incentive to be less than forthright in their whole issue. It certainly wasn’t anything about the public interest.

[1440]

They were not addressing the public’s concerns or verifying the accuracy of the information and reliability of the experts. They did not assess the current compliance and performance, as well as the financial stability, of the applicant. This is only an abbreviated list of the requirements that the Minister of Environment’s designate did not fulfil.

Again, I suggest that what was really on this designated representative’s mind was that it was all about their continued focus on getting to yes. They were getting to yes before they even did their due diligence. It’s my view after reading some of the evidence that came out as a result of those days — day after day and weeks and weeks — of hearings.

Finally, as the hearings progressed, we learned of the questionable practices of South Island Aggregates. They are currently operating as a quarry under a Ministry of Mines permit, and there have been instances of non-compliance with the permit in the past. These include possibly blasting below the water table level as well as blasting into neighbouring CVRD parkland.

As the lawyer for Shawinigan Residents Association pointed out in his closing arguments, Mr. Block, who is one of the co-owners, committed perjury several times while under oath at the Environmental Appeal Board hearings. What does that tell you about the suitability of the operator to reliably oversee a self-regulating permit?

The evidence against the proposal has been overwhelming. The notion of putting the drinking water of 12,000 people at risk for the benefit of one business is insane, one of the representatives of the professional group suggested.

The environmental panel has promised to be efficient in its decision-making. We do not know when the ruling will be issued, and we do not know if they choose to uphold the permit. However, the community has already said that they are committed that they will choose to continue to fight.

The next step is a judicial appeal. Shawinigan Lake community is now holding its breath, hoping for an outcome that they have fought so passionately for. I hope that the minister will listen and cancel this permit.

Hon. T. Wat: It is an honour for me to rise in the House today to speak to the Lieutenant-Governor’s Speech from the Throne, to talk about my portfolio and

the work that we are doing to grow and diversify B.C.’s economy and create well-paying jobs for British Columbians.

As we head into a new budget cycle, we need to celebrate the successes of our hard work. We are proud to be once again delivering a balanced budget, a feat that is out of reach for many jurisdictions and that protects taxpayers and sustains public services by managing costs and controlling spending. We are also focused on saying yes to economic growth so that we can grow revenues instead of raising taxes.

We can attribute our financial health to our diverse economy, which we are proud of and want to continue to diversify. We are more than a resource economy. Look at our opportunities in agroforestry, international education, mining and energy, natural gas, technology and green economy, tourism as well as transportation.

We can also attribute our financial health to discipline in controlling expenditure, as well as our success at breaking into Asia-Pacific markets. As Minister of International Trade, I am proud to say that our ministry has played an important role in that success.

We have worked diligently to deliver on our mandate, contributing to B.C.’s strong economic position today by opening and expanding international markets for B.C. goods and services, attracting investment for our provinces’ businesses, entrepreneurs and communities, and by leveraging our many historical, cultural and business links to countries across the Pacific and around the world.

[1445]

One of the most effective ways to nurture its current relationships and build new ones is through trade missions. I am very happy to report that we supported over 400 inbound and outbound trade missions since April 2011, including three major Premier’s missions to Asian markets that resulted in business deals and partnership agreements valued at over \$1.8 billion.

This year the Premier embarked on her seventh international trade mission, returning to B.C.’s sister province of Guangdong, China.

B.C. and Guangdong province are celebrating a very important milestone this year, the 20th anniversary of our sister province agreement. Last September, during a visit from Guangdong’s governor, Zhu Xiaodan, B.C. and Guangdong signed an action plan to celebrate this anniversary and build on our trade and cultural ties.

The Premier’s trip will also build on a memorandum of understanding in which both the B.C. government and the Guangdong subcouncil of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade agreed to promote investment and trade initiatives, participate in information exchanges, introduce potential investors to each other’s markets and review industry sector priorities for two-way investment. Further details will be announced soon.

These trade missions have helped develop our strong trade relationships in Asia, and they have a direct impact on our families by creating jobs in our province. For example, in 2014 we attracted 13 Asian international offices to locate in our province, and one office expansion occurred. Our exports continue to grow, increasing by 6.3 percent in 2014 compared to 2013. This has been a great year for investment venture capital attraction, with \$94 million invested in 240 small businesses.

Our government has also been involved in negotiations on federal trade agreements such as the Canada–European Union Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, CETA, and the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement. Once in effect, CETA will open one of the world's largest markets to British Columbia. It will lift 98 percent of trade tariffs and trade barriers between Canada and the EU, comprising 28 member countries. The key outcomes of CETA are very clear: more jobs and economic opportunities for British Columbians.

Another exciting opportunity for B.C. business is the Canada-Korea Free Trade Agreement. This is Canada's first free trade agreement with an Asian country. South Korea is already B.C.'s fourth-largest export destination, with \$2 billion in exports in 2014. It's worthy to note that 50 percent of Canada's trade exports to South Korea come from British Columbia. The government of Canada estimated that B.C.'s exports to South Korea could increase by as much as 32 percent, impacting key sectors such as forestry, LNG, seafood and agrifood.

We are working very hard to reach out to business in B.C. so that they can take advantage of these opportunities. As part of that effort, we are committing to a long-term engagement and outreach program to increase trade and investment between B.C. and South Korea. A key component of the plan is a B.C.–South Korea trade and investment forum to be held in June this year.

I would like to conclude by saying that one of B.C.'s most valuable resources is its people. We are the most ethnically diverse province in Canada, welcoming nearly 40,000 new immigrants every year. I'm proud to say that I am one of those immigrants who emigrated to this beautiful province 25 years ago. All of the immigrants, including myself, have been contributing to the economic growth of this province.

It's our multicultural society that gives us our significant competitive advantages and an important bridge across the Pacific — a bridge with family and business connections in key countries and world markets. Cultural diversity and increased participation by all cultures is vitally important to creating a strong and vibrant future for B.C.

[1450]

An important aspect of respecting our cultural diversity is having the courage to recognize when things did not go well. That is why, as part of the government's apology for historical wrongs against B.C.'s Chinese-

Canadian community, the Legacy Initiatives Advisory Council was established in October 2014.

The council is working with Chinese-Canadian communities and other key partners to ensure legacy projects are successfully implemented, including identifying and recognizing historical and cultural sites and artifacts, creating a book that celebrates Chinese-Canadian achievement in B.C. and implementing the B.C. education curriculum supplement plan.

We can all be part of the role that we will play in helping to honour those Chinese Canadians who helped shape B.C.'s culture. After all, our many different cultures contribute to the overall economic health and quality of life in our communities. Our goal is to ensure a meaningful legacy is created for all British Columbians to enjoy. This goal will carry us forward as we continue to make our province a more prosperous and inclusive place to live.

Hon. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak in support of the Speech from the Throne.

S. Robison: I am pleased to rise in the House today in response to the throne speech in this spring 2015 session of the Legislature.

It is always an honour and a privilege to stand here as a representative of the citizens of Coquitlam-Maillardville. My community is a suburban community that was once considered a francophone rural mill town. Today, over 100 years later, Coquitlam-Maillardville is a thriving, diverse community that is no longer francophone, no longer rural and no longer a mill town.

Today Coquitlam-Maillardville is very suburban and very diverse. It is so diverse that on a single street of 20 houses, you can find people who come from 20 different countries, speaking 20 different languages. The people of Coquitlam-Maillardville are hard-working people who are committed to their families and committed to their communities.

The people that I represent want a government that understands their challenges and a government that will act in ways that provide opportunities and provide services that will assist them in doing what's right for their loved ones. It was with this in mind that I listened to the throne speech on Tuesday. It was with this in mind that I scoured the throne speech yesterday, looking for the tidbits that I could go back to my constituents with and say: "This government cares about you and your family." But I couldn't find much that will make life any easier for the people of Coquitlam-Maillardville.

During the 30 minutes of the throne speech there were many words spoken, but very little was actually said. Words are merely words, and this government, I have to say, is good with words. Debt-free B.C., prosperity fund, violence-free B.C., A GP for Me — these are all catchy words that have been used by the Premier and her caucus for several years now. But they are mere-

ly words. It's really easy to say these kinds of words. I want to talk about how words backed up with little or no action damage the spirit and hurt people we say we care about.

You see, I am a family therapist, and I've been working with all kinds of people for over 20 years. And therapy, or counselling, is an activity of words. We use words to convey meaning and intention. When I worked with families, and couples in particular, it was not uncommon for words to be shared between spouses in our session.

People would use words to commit to changing what they've been doing in the relationship. They would use words that would convey that they would be more attentive, that they would be more thoughtful, words to convey that they would be more patient or more supportive. Whatever words that they wanted to use, that they thought their partner wanted to hear, were words that they would use to commit to being different in the relationship.

In caring, committed relationships, I would often see progress, where words were backed up with action and behaviours that supported those words that were said in session.

[1455]

There were times when a couple would return, and we would monitor progress, and we would see that the words were not followed up by supporting actions and behaviours. Of course, we would see that the relationship suffered. The partner expecting the behaviour change would be disappointed and frustrated — frustrated that although their partner was saying all the right things, they felt that the partner really didn't understand what was going on, or perhaps their partner wasn't listening, or perhaps their partner wasn't caring. The experience left them with this notion that they were just saying the right thing at the time.

What we have heard once again in this throne speech were words — words that are not being backed up with action that will make lives better for all British Columbians. With this Premier, we have someone who knows to say all the right things. But at the end of the day, British Columbians are left disappointed and frustrated — frustrated to see that there are no changes in action or behaviour or policy that would back up what the words are saying.

Let's just take a closer look at some of those words. Let's start with "prosperity fund." This was certainly a key element of the Liberal election platform. The words that the Liberals put out to British Columbians were that if elected to government, they would develop a prosperity fund.

Actually, here I have a news release. It's a news release from exactly two years ago today — February 12, 2013. "Billions of dollars in revenue will be dedicated to the B.C. prosperity fund." Another one: "Our LNG industry

is developing quickly." And then there's: "Information on the LNG prosperity fund will be published annually so that British Columbians know how much money is in the fund and how it is being spent."

Interesting. There was nothing in this throne speech that speaks to the prosperity fund now, nothing to speak of how much money is in the fund or how it's going to be spent. I don't think I've ever seen an annual report so that British Columbians can see for themselves how much money is in that fund that was promised to them, nothing about how that money is going to be spent.

Words slip off the tongue, but the actions that will make lives better for British Columbians and the people of Coquitlam-Maillardville just aren't being delivered.

Let's look at these other words: "Violence-free B.C." Last year we had a promise in that throne speech for a comprehensive strategy to end violence against women. How did this government follow through on these words? In the last budget, the Liberal government actually cut funding to victim services and crime prevention, during a year that hit a five-year high for spousal violence.

Then just days before this current throne speech, for the next session of government, the Premier identifies up to \$3 million in civil forfeiture funds for the time being. But the government's February 6, 2015, release says: "Over \$3.4 million in grants from civil forfeiture proceeds were used to support vulnerable women in 2014 alone." Does this mean that we've gone from \$3.4 million down to \$3 million? And what does "up to \$3 million" really mean?

Having been an active community program developer in Coquitlam for many years in my previous career, I know, and I believe everyone in the House knows, that developing any program without stable funding is not the best use of resources. Can you imagine developing a program that supports women to rebuild their lives, one of the commitments outlined in the press release, only to have that funding cut in 2016? What does that do to the women who are relying on this new program? What does it do to their children? What does it do to the relationships and new partnerships that service providers are to develop, as outlined in that press release?

This is not a long-term plan. This is not a long-term plan to stop violence against women. The words "violence-free B.C.," which sound so lovely, cannot be achieved with this announcement. They are merely words spoken with no real plan to back them up.

If this government truly cared about ending violence against women, then this Premier would announce a stable source of funding for anti-violence and support programs. She would follow through on commitments she and the Minister of Justice made after the murder of Serena Vermeersch to improve monitoring of dangerous offenders. She would finally act on the 2012 Oppal report's urgent measures to fund the safe transportation

for women along Highway 16.

[1500]

This is what my constituents expect from their government. Saying words just to get what you want in a moment without following through is a betrayal to the relationship, and the people in my constituency are feeling betrayed by this government.

What about “Debt-free B.C.”? Those are also really lovely words echoed by this government. Whatever happened to those words, the ones that were printed on the side of that campaign bus? The Liberal government says it’s committed to debt management, but it is the government that has had the fastest increase in debt in B.C.’s history.

In March 2011 the provincial debt was \$45.2 billion. Here we are, four years later, and it’s estimated that we will have a debt by the end of the fiscal year of over \$63 billion.

Words like “debt-free,” “violence-free,” “prosperity fund” — they’re thrown around to make the Liberals look good in that particular moment, but without any real substance to back them up, without the commitment to realize these ideas, they are merely words.

With this government, words get bandied about because they sound good, but to people, words are commitments. They are commitments to the people of Coquitlam-Maillardville. They are commitments to the people of British Columbia. This government is not living up to its commitments it has made over the years.

What am I hearing from my constituents? What’s life really like for them these days? I am hearing that life is getting harder. Increases to MSP, hydro, ferries, bridge tolls, ICBC rates — all hidden taxes that are paid by everyone regardless of income. All these hidden taxes are making it difficult to make ends meet.

The people in my constituency, as I’m sure it is for people throughout this province, are feeling nickel-and-dimed everywhere they turn. They see the costs of living going up, and they see their wages and savings being eaten up by those creeping costs.

Earlier this year I wrote an op-ed in our local paper about all of the community leaders in the Tri-Cities, mostly politicians from all levels of government, and how we were running around the Tri-Cities raising awareness about the food bank, that the food bank shelves were empty and that we all ought to be doing our fair share.

It is the giving season, and it’s the best fundraising time of the year if you’re fundraising for poverty relief programs. I wrote my op-ed challenging all of our community leaders to think beyond poverty relief and to start advocating for poverty reduction.

Taking photo ops with a box of food we collect at our constituency offices that we’re going to deliver to the food bank, and then not doing anything to reduce poverty, is just about a photo opportunity and does

nothing to reduce poverty in our communities.

I received a letter in response to that op-ed. I’d like to read it here in the House, because I think it just really speaks to the experience of people in my community.

“I agree with the essence of your column. I recently retired after more than 40 years working, both as a postal worker and, later, as a health care worker.

“For the last ten years I worked in a seniors home in Vancouver. When I retired I was earning less than \$18 an hour, considered to be poverty level. My small pension from that place barely covers our medical-dental plans. Our CPP and OAP cheques are inadequate.

“Our rent is affordable because we live in a small trailer park, but the property will likely be sold to a developer when the Evergreen line opens in 2016. I don’t know what we will do when my savings, mostly an inheritance, runs out.

“Thanks for writing that column. I hope it has some impact.

“Sincerely, Brian Sproule.”

Life is hard for many in my community. This throne speech, the one that we heard on Tuesday, offers absolutely nothing for Brian and his family.

Why are British Columbians feeling so squeezed? Squeezed to pay for things their families need. Squeezed for time because they are stuck in traffic. Or squeezed for time because they have to pick up additional shifts at work to pay for the added care their aging mother needs, or testing their child with learning challenges needs because the public schools can no longer afford to provide testing services.

In my community, as I’m sure exists throughout the province, wages have stagnated. The inflation-adjusted median income fell 2.4 percent between 2006 and 2012. Young people, young adults, like my children, are having a real hard time finding jobs that pay a decent wage. They are in their mid-20s, living at home because they can’t make enough money that will pay their bills if they are to pay market rents.

[1505]

While the Premier talks about young adults on the couch, and she characterizes them as lazy because they are living in their parents’ home, I’m here to tell her and her government that our young adult children are busting their tails. They’re busting their tails to find a way to participate in the economy.

I should know. I am the parent of two young adults, both still living at home and both finding the financial burden of the most expensive housing in the country, combined with poor transit, increased Hydro, MSP and ICBC rates that keep going up as significant barriers to financial independence.

Rather than deal with this problem, the Premier would rather call our adult children lazy. How is that for leadership in this province? Our children are burdened with increasing costs of living, enormous student debt and poor economic opportunities.

So many of my children's friends are juggling a raft of retail and other low-wage jobs, running from the coffee shop where they work the morning shift to the daycare job where they work the afternoon shift to the restaurant where they work the evening shift. This is how our young people are finding their way in the world. This is how our young people are making ends meet. This is what awaits them after they finish post-secondary school.

While the Premier chastises my children for living at home, I'm here to tell her that they are hard-working young adults who want what their parents had and that this government is not helping. And to top all of that off, to top off the increased MSP, the increased Hydro, the increased ICBC rates, what does this government do? They give people who make the most money a tax break. And there was nothing in this throne speech for my children or for their friends, nothing on assistance with housing, student loans or supporting — really supporting — the expansion of a transit network.

There was nothing in the throne speech that talked about what's going on in my community around access to transit, nothing to address issues that we have with TransLink governance. Either this government isn't listening, or they just don't care.

What did the government have to say about transportation in general in this throne speech? Transportation is a significant issue in Coquitlam-Maillardville. The government says: "Transportation is crucial, because our trade depends on it." And then it goes on to say that the Malahat safety improvement project and work to increase capacity and reduce bottlenecks through the new west partnership with Alberta and Saskatchewan.... These projects are highlighted as examples.

I'm not sure how the Malahat project, which I understand needed to get done, is connected to our trade issues. But I can tell you that if this government were really committed to making transportation corridors more efficient by increasing capacity and reducing bottlenecks, they would have at least announced the commitment to provide funding for transit infrastructure ahead of this plebiscite.

If this government were really committed to opening up transportation corridors, they would do more than just say they will support a yes vote. This government, a government that claims to want openness, transparency and accountability, would hear what the people in the Lower Mainland are saying about TransLink.

If this government truly wanted to work collaboratively with the mayors, if this Premier really, really wanted to work collaboratively with the mayors, then she would hear what they are saying and this throne speech would have said a thing or two about how this government will support their work by fixing the governance mess that is TransLink.

I am certainly hearing from my constituents in Coquitlam-Maillardville that supporting this referendum is hard to do because they don't trust TransLink to be responsible and accountable stewards of their hard-earned tax dollars. If we had a government that was paying attention and cared what people were saying, we would have heard in this throne speech how this government plans to change TransLink's governance, how they plan to change this governance structure, a structure that this government set up years ago.

If we had a government that cared about taxpayers in the Lower Mainland, they would address ways to increase transparency and accountability with the TransLink governance model so that taxpayers in the Lower Mainland could rest assured that their tax dollars are wisely spent on the transit infrastructure that the region desperately needs.

What else have I been hearing from my constituency these last few months that would help inform this government so that they can chart a course for the future? I've certainly been hearing about the underfunding of education. What did we hear in the throne speech on that? We hear about the development of three offshore schools and some mention of "bringing some of the best thinking on learning from around the world to B.C. students, teachers and parents" to make sure our children are ready to inherit the world.

I do recall seeing a lot of promotion about this on my Twitter feed, about the Focus on Learning forum. I'm not sure that there's really going to be money behind it in the budget to move this forward, and this grand plan doesn't speak to how to help children who aren't succeeding in today's classrooms.

[1510]

Of course, I have a few letters from my constituents to read into the record, because I think it's important that this government hear what real people are saying about their real problems.

"I generally don't speak out, for a few reasons, not the least of which is that most people who are sharing stories have kids with autism spectrum disorder, physical challenges, cerebral palsy or diagnosed mental health issues like anxiety or depression. My children have none of these things, but they do have special needs.

"I'm a parent of gifted children. Because of the triage situation of our education system these days, our children's needs aren't being met. Yet we feel guilty drawing attention to this fact because — let's face it — they aren't in as desperate need as the kids with autism and CP and trisomy 21.

"My eldest is in fifth grade and testing in the 99th percentile. He is applying to the math enrichment program. He had no enrichment until last year, despite his first-grade teacher identifying him as one of those to watch for the challenge program.

"My middle child is in third grade, and he is in no man's

land. Despite him being sent to the challenge centre in earlier years, the system offers no place for grade 3 kids who are suspected of being gifted but haven't yet been assessed.

"He is the kid who finds things boring, because he intuitively already understands what his class is being taught, and he has for years. Luckily, he had a great teacher and principal who have singled him out for a bit of special consideration.

"My daughter — well, I don't know if she's gifted or not, but she will be fine no matter what. Even at six, you can tell she will achieve what she wants. This is what it's like for my children.

"Regards,

"Kristina Lee"

I have another one, a little bit more heartbreaking.

"I think you know that I have a daughter, gifted with learning disabilities. She has definitely struggled with less and less help available in secondary school. At her current high school she was told she would be funded for her gifted program or for her learning support but not both, even though she has both designations.

"She was excited to pursue the gifted program at the start of grade 10 last year. She was an honour student and in an accelerated gifted education program. With the lack of support available last year, she started to struggle, and we asked to ensure her recommended accommodations were being made. She was told that we had to advocate for these accommodations.

"As things got worse, we asked for further testing, as her last tests in the district were eight years earlier. We were told that, given her continued high performance, she could not be prioritized for support or updated sight testing to further understand learning difficulties. Two and a half months later she failed the class.

"Starting out again this year with marks in the high 90s, she got the flu and missed a week of school. No support available to understand missed work, now she's in danger of failing math. She was achieving 90 percent last year and mentoring fellow gifted students. What a travesty.

"Last district-paid learning testing was in 2005. We paid privately for testing in 2009, but we no longer have the means for private testing, since I am disabled and no longer able to work. If she doesn't have updated testing before going into grade 12 provincial exams, will she qualify for accommodations?

"Without accommodations, they will not see what this long-time honour student is capable of. Without doing well in those provincials and without updated documentation of moderate-level learning disabilities, how successful is university going to be? Will she just give up?

"Alexander Graham Bell, Edison, da Vinci — so many gifted people also have learning disabilities. Are we returning to the Dark Ages? Even though we now know how to unlock the skills of these students with appropriate technologies and support, we are too underfunded to do so.

"Bottom line. Yet another student who is being failed because classroom teachers are too stretched. There are too few specialist teachers remaining on any given staff. Resources to get extra help are a moot point without the staff to identify and

apply the expertise.

"Within seven months an all-honours student drops to failing one course, then two, before she can qualify for help. And which other students now lose out because my daughter finally won that waiting-to-fail lineup and gets help?

"The system is bleeding to death. Teachers are demoralized and burning out. Students aren't succeeding, where they once did — all due to underfunding in the system.

"Thanks for listening.

"Laurel Lawson"

On behalf of the constituents of Coquitlam-Mail-lardville, I am deeply, deeply disappointed with the content in this throne speech. The words on the campaign trail and in the announcements that get made at regular intervals don't speak to a government that lives up to its words. These words that we heard on Tuesday are more of the same — merely words, words without commitment.

[1515]

In light of this, I would like to move the amendment standing in my name on the order paper.

[Be it resolved that the motion "We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, in session assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious Speech which Your Honour has addressed to us at the opening of the present session," be amended by adding the following:

"and that the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia regrets that the families in the province have seen their wages fall as they pay more for their basic services, while the government gives a break to the highest two per cent of income earners; regrets that the government has failed to meet its commitment that all British Columbians will have access to a general practitioner by 2015; regrets that seniors still do not have flexible options for home care or assisted living; regrets that young people in the province face uncertain job prospects as the government has bet on one sector rather than working with businesses and workers across B.C. to reach their potential; and regrets that the government will not fulfill its commitment for at least one LNG pipeline and terminal online in B.C. by 2015."]

I would like to speak to the amendment.

Deputy Speaker: Proceed.

On the amendment.

S. Robison: I mentioned a while ago about work as a family therapist and when the relationship would be challenged because someone in the partnership wasn't true to their word or not able or willing to live up to their commitment. When this would happen, we would find ways to heal the relationship. I spent 20 years helping people find ways to come together, and this amend-

ment speaks to that.

When we don't follow through, it can be due to a range of reasons. Sometimes we weren't authentic in the moment. We just put words out there because they sounded good in the moment. Sometimes we make commitments truly believing that we can follow through, and then we can't. And sometimes we make commitments because we think that's what others want to hear, but we really know we can never deliver.

Regardless of the reason, it's important in the relationship to own up, to take responsibility and to demonstrate regret at not being able to deliver as promised. So in this amendment I identify a number of ways that the throne speech can be amended to accommodate these failures.

Firstly, the government should acknowledge its failure to help families that continue to fall behind financially. Acknowledging that increasing the MSP, increasing ICBC and Hydro rates, along with increasing ferry fares and tuition have all led to an increased financial burden on middle-class British Columbians — those who are working hard to pay their bills, feed their families and care for their loved ones — only to add insult to injury when this government gives tax breaks to the top 2 percent of British Columbians.

This government needs to acknowledge the error....

Deputy Speaker: Member, I believe the member for Oak Bay–Gordon Head has a point of order.

Point of Order

A. Weaver: I rise with a point of order, hon. Speaker.

With respect to the member, this amendment is out of order, in my view, as it has not been on the order paper for two days. The first time that this amendment could be brought to the Legislature would be Monday of next week.

Deputy Speaker: I'm being told by the Clerks that the amendment was indeed passed to the Clerks on Tuesday. This being Thursday, it has indeed been two days since its tabling.

Member for Coquitlam-Maillardville, please proceed.

Throne Speech Debate

S. Robinson: There is a burden right now on middle-class British Columbians — people who are working hard to pay their bills, feed their families and care for their loved ones. And then, to add insult to injury, this government needs to acknowledge the error of their \$230 million tax cut that is going to B.C.'s top earning 2 percent.

This tax break is an insult to middle income earners. Those who can most afford to pay taxes are getting a

break, while those least able to afford taxes are having to pay more, with various fees and increases in payments to government.

Secondly, the government needs to acknowledge its failure in delivering the GP for Me plan. I imagine that this might have been one of the commitments that rolled off the tongue rather nicely. "GP for Me" sounds really good. They're actually, what I would call, delicious words, because they roll so nicely off the tongue. Perhaps there were even some very real intentions to deliver.

[1520]

But when you come up short, it's important to take responsibility. By 2015, every British Columbian was to have access to a general practitioner. Here we are into the second month of 2015, and we all know that there has not been delivery on this commitment to British Columbians.

The minister's response last year when challenged about meeting the target? He said at the time: "Well, we'll have to wait and see. We still have almost two years to achieve that." That's what he said in an interview last February. The minister is choosing that by the end of 2015 everyone will have a GP or perhaps, maybe, now a nurse practitioner. But given what I am hearing from people in my constituency, people who cannot find a GP in my community, I highly doubt that we will see this achieved even by the end of the year. There ought to be an apology to the people of British Columbia, one that points to a promise made — the words sounded so good — but that the government wasn't able to deliver.

What about this government's commitment to seniors? These are people who have worked their entire lives to raise their families. They paid their taxes to build this amazing province of so many riches. What do we say to them about their access to home care or care facilities? Seniors deserve to have supports that allow them to stay in their homes as long as possible, and when they can no longer stay at home, they need to know that there is an appropriate placement and support available to them as they live out their remaining years.

Our parents and grandparents deserve to be treated with dignity so that they are assisted to the bathroom when nature calls, not when it is scheduled by the service provider who has to operate care facilities like assembly lines. This government ought to express some regret to them in this throne speech. This throne speech does nothing to make the remaining years of their lives better for them.

It's more than just seniors who are being let down by this government. This Liberal government ought to apologize to our young people who face difficulty accessing education upgrades and uncertain job prospects because this government has bet on LNG to the exclusion of other sectors. As a result, job prospects for young people are compromised. Just this morning

I read in our local paper, the *Tri-City News*, an article about how this government's policy to start charging for high school upgrades is impacting young people in my community.

I quote from the article: "Tri-City college- and university-bound students who have already graduated but still need to upgrade English 12 and Biology 12 or other high school credit courses are signing up in droves to take advantage of free tuition before provincial funding runs out May 1."

The article goes on to note: "Among the hardest hit by the change in government policy may be young adults from 19 to 25 years of age who are still trying to get their careers established and who may require additional high school courses or need better marks to get into college or university. This group currently makes up about 30 percent, or 154 of the 473, of students who have so far enrolled for high school credit courses with continuing education this spring."

After May 1 the school district will have to charge students for upgrading courses directly. This was previously funded by the province, and the school board hasn't yet determined the cost for these courses but estimates that the charge after May 1 will be in the neighbourhood of \$500 or more per course. Even our children are getting hit with new fees so that life is harder for them under this Liberal government policy.

This government's behaviour of nickel-and-diming British Columbians is making life harder for average, regular folk — people like my children, people like my neighbours, people like the constituents who live throughout Coquitlam-Maillardville. Top earners in this province? Well, they get a tax break.

What about those job prospects, those 100,000 jobs that were supposed to be coming to our children and our communities with LNG? The government put all its eggs in that LNG basket, and they are coming up with bubkes — nothing, nada. What should this government have been doing instead? This government should have been working with businesses and workers across B.C. so that all sectors could reach their full potential.

How does this government talk about what it's going to do now that gas prices have dropped and they see the 17 LNG plants they told us would materialize not likely to happen? Well, the one that caught me during the throne speech, the one that caught my attention, was how this government talks about how it values tourism. Really?

[1525]

How does that jibe with their decision to increase ferry fares, eliminate or reduce ferry routes and, more recently, increase camping fees this past year? This government didn't even do an analysis of how these changes in the ferry system would impact tourism in ferry-dependent communities. Now they talk about how they value tourism — more words.

There was also plenty in the throne speech about eliminating red tape. This red tape elimination activity is not new. It's been an active project throughout the Liberal government tenure, for 14 years. One would think that with all this effort, most of the red tape would have been eliminated by now.

Or perhaps they have these make-work projects. On the one hand, you develop policies over here that create red tape, and then two years later you make a commitment to eliminate red tape. You just keep cycling through these announcements, making it look like you're making life better for small business in our province.

The throne speech mentions the value of a diverse economy. Lovely words. If the Premier and her government truly believe that we have a diverse economy, then why has the Premier been exclusively pitching LNG for the past several years and ignoring every other sector?

My colleagues and I on this side of the House have been referring to our diverse economy, in response to the throne speech last spring and again last fall, in response to the government's singular focus on LNG. We have been calling on this government to recognize the forestry sector, the mining sector, the technology sector.

New Democrats understand the importance of building economic resilience. We understand the importance of capitalizing on our strengths. We have been challenging this government to address all economic regions of our province, not just those communities where an LNG industry may develop.

British Columbians know that we have a diverse economy, and this government has just woken up to that? Or perhaps another explanation is that things aren't going so well on that LNG front. Perhaps they should distract from that promise they made to the people of British Columbia and talk about the rest of the province. Perhaps British Columbians won't notice.

Regardless, this government needs to own up to the fact that they have been ignoring every other economic sector in this province. Furthermore, this government needs to own up to the fact that their commitment to have LNG up and running, to start filling those coffers in that prosperity fund — just not going to happen like promised.

This Liberal government said there would be at least one LNG pipeline and terminal on line in B.C. by 2015. It's 2015, and we still don't have a single commitment.

That promised prosperity fund? Words that sounded so good during the campaign in the moment, words used in order to get elected, were not grounded in reality. This government, keen to get re-elected, said what it needed to achieve that goal — just like some of the spouses I have seen in counselling sessions, saying what they think the other spouse wants to hear but not being able to deliver.

This is the stuff that results in disappointment and can shatter relationships. This government has made many commitments — promises of jobs, promises of a general practitioner for every British Columbian, promises of seniors living out their years with dignity, promises of LNG, promises that our young people will have job prospects that will pay them a living wage so they can move out of their parents' houses and be financially self-sufficient.

This throne speech should acknowledge these failures to deliver on their commitments and acknowledge to British Columbians that we need a new course — a course based in reality that is in touch with what real British Columbians need, a course that makes sure that British Columbians can get good jobs, security for their families and opportunities for our children. That's the British Columbia that my constituents and all British Columbians deserve.

Hon. S. Anton: We have a throne speech that is positive, that creates a vision for the future. We have an amendment that is full of doom and gloom. It is not necessary to amend the Speech from the Throne.

In the meantime, I do have something to say on the speech.

Deputy Speaker: We're on the amendment currently.

Hon. S. Anton: Do you wish to vote on the amendment? I want to speak on the amendment.

Deputy Speaker: There are further speakers to the amendment, and then we'll go back to the address and the response.

[1530]

Hon. S. Anton: Let me just say one more thing, then. As I said, I'm not going to say much but just say that a positive vision trumps a negative vision every time, and we will be voting against the amendment.

A. Weaver: I rise to table a subamendment to the amendment for the following reasons.

The role of government is to offer British Columbians a vision. The role of opposition, if they do not like the vision government is offering, is to offer a counter-vision. Unfortunately, the amendment before us does not offer a counter-vision. All it does is simply hurl abuse, hurl negativity on the government's vision.

Now, I agree with what was said in the actual amendment. That is, I agree that the government did promise to give every British Columbian a GP by 2015. In fact, in Victoria, the region I am in, there is not a single general practitioner accepting new patients south of Mill Bay. That's more than 350,000 people. I agree with that.

I agree that seniors do not have flexible options for

home care. I agree that young people in the province face uncertain job prospects, in particular in light of the fact that we're re-engineering our education system for a hypothetical industry that I've been saying for two years now — not one, not two, actually more than two years now — is not supported by the economic reality that the world is oversupplied with natural gas and ours is expensive.

There are many other reasons that I agree with the amendment. However, it is our responsibility as opposition, when we don't agree with the government's vision, to offer a vision that we could hang our hats on. So I subamend the amendment. I move:

[Be it resolved that the motion "We, Her Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia, in session assembled, beg leave to thank Your Honour for the gracious Speech which Your Honour has addressed to us at the opening of the present session," be amended by adding the following:

"and that the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia regrets that the families in the province have seen their wages fall as they pay more for their basic services, while the government gives a break to the highest two per cent of income earners; regrets that the government has failed to meet its commitment that all British Columbians will have access to a general practitioner by 2015; regrets that seniors still do not have flexible options for home care or assisted living; regrets that young people in the province face uncertain job prospects as the government has bet on one sector rather than working with businesses and workers across B.C. to reach their potential; and regrets that the government will not fulfill its commitment for at least one LNG pipeline and terminal online in B.C. by 2015."

and recognizes that leadership in government requires a commitment to seek out and incorporate ideas from others while leadership in opposition requires a commitment to offering solutions, and hence calls on this House to collaborate on the development of a new vision for British Columbia that builds on the good ideas of all members, regardless of their party affiliation."]

With that, I'll sit down.

On the subamendment.

Deputy Speaker: I will note that actually I was in error of the customary practice of this House when it comes to the address in response. That is that members can speak both to the Speech from the Throne as well as the amendment, as well as the now subamendment, for up to four days, in the standing orders. So we will not be taking a vote on the amendment at this point.

I will now recognize the member for Vancouver-Fairview and will also note, as is customary on these issues, that we are addressing both the address in response as well as the amendments at this time. This

would represent the member's time generally on the address in response.

A. Weaver: I rise on a point of order. I would not have stood to raise my subamendment had you not ruled that we had to speak on the amendment today. I feel that I was forced to put together a subamendment and waive my time accordingly, that I had prepared in response, in light of a ruling that you now claim was not correct.

Deputy Speaker: I apologize to the member for Oak Bay–Gordon Head, but I will recognize the member for Oak Bay–Gordon Head again in this debate. I will also recognize the Minister of Justice again.

Hon. S. Anton: I think I was actually next.

[1535]

Deputy Speaker: I will recognize the Minister of Justice at this point.

As I have ruled, that does stand.

Hon. S. Anton: It is a great pleasure to rise in the House today and speak in favour of the Speech from the Throne, which has outlined so eloquently our vision not just for the present but for future generations. As I said a moment ago, it is a vision full of opportunities for British Columbians. It is a vision for sustainable growth and for building a stronger, better and more prosperous British Columbia.

I'd like to start, though, by thanking the riding of Vancouver-Fraserview for supporting me, for the vibrant, engaged, multicultural and hard-working community that is Vancouver-Fraserview in the southeast of the city of Vancouver. It is a riding which is full of friendly people who work hard, who are interested in what we're doing in Victoria and interested in the sustainability and the prosperity of their great province of British Columbia, which many of them have chosen to make their home.

I'd like to thank the people who help me in my riding, the volunteers who help me, who are working every day to help me and to help our riding of Vancouver-Fraserview. I'd like to thank my office, my two staff, Tanya Tan and Yulin Shih. I'd like to thank my family, who have helped me for so many years. My brother was here a couple of days ago for the throne speech, bringing his wife and his five young boys to see what government looks like and to hear the message of hope and prosperity, the message given out in our throne speech.

Some of our ministries in government support the building of our resource industries in British Columbia. They support the LNG industry. They support the mining industry and forest industries and so on. Other of our ministries support different aspects of building our economy and the diversity of our economy. We just

heard from the Minister of International Trade, who told us about the trade ties that British Columbia is successfully building around the world and, in particular, with Asia.

In my case, as the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, it is justice and public safety. It is the role of this ministry, in support of all of the other things that we do in British Columbia, which I am going to talk about. In particular, today I'm going to talk about how Justice supports our government's agenda and it supports citizens and businesses in British Columbia, leading to a safe and just province, the province of British Columbia.

Canadians across the country have sent governments a clear message. They want a justice system that is timely, efficient and effective — the kind of system all of us as partners in justice are working towards in British Columbia. Our government has been clear that we share this goal.

As Attorney General and Minister of Justice, one of my top priorities is to transform and modernize our justice system. We envision a system that works for families, for businesses and for all British Columbians, one that is accessible, affordable, effective and accountable.

I'd like to point out, though, in starting, that British Columbia's justice system is already exceptionally strong and is recognized as one of the best in the world. It is a multifaceted, living system that seeks to be responsive to society in all of its nuanced complexity and to treat every citizen as equal before the law. We are proud of our justice system in British Columbia, and I want to thank everyone who works so hard to support it. But we know we can make it better, and we're always working to improve it.

When I first took over the Attorney General and Justice portfolio from my predecessor in June of 2013, I inherited a ministry already undergoing significant change. I stated at that time that our commitments to safe communities, to strong families and to a timely, transparent and confidence-inspiring justice system were steadfast, and they still are.

[1540]

In 2012 my predecessor issued the ministry's *White Paper on Justice Reform*, a guiding document for transforming and modernizing the justice system. In addition, we had commissioned the well-known and respected lawyer Geoffrey Cowper to review B.C.'s criminal justice system with a view to identifying areas of challenge and areas for improvement. The Cowper report was delivered in August of 2012 and contained far-reaching recommendations for positive change in our criminal justice system. I'm pleased to be able to report that we have acted on and completed many of Mr. Cowper's recommendations.

In the spirit of the Cowper report and the white paper, we've been working hard on changes in approaches to justice that will increase accessibility for

all British Columbians and that simultaneously respect the value of the taxpayer dollar. We understand that improving access to justice is not just about adding more money to the system. It's about innovation. It's about looking at new and original ways of doing things, working with stakeholders and empowering British Columbians to resolve their own disputes.

In this respect, our reputation precedes us. British Columbia is regarded as the most innovative province in Canada when it comes to justice reform. That is a feather in our cap, collectively speaking.

In particular, I want to thank our courts for their interest in innovation. We have seen real leadership in this regard from the Supreme Court of Canada, with their Action Committee on Access to Justice, and from the courts at all levels in British Columbia. We believe in a coordinated approach to justice so that those who need it know what their options are and they feel supported and informed. We've made great headway, and we continue to work diligently on further improvements.

We've paved the way to improvement with legislation. In 2013 we brought in the Justice Reform and Transparency Act, which establishes the framework for an effective, efficient and transparent justice system that is strengthened by collaboration amongst justice leaders and stakeholders. The act reformed court administration processes and fulfilled key recommendations in the Cowper report, in addition to enabling many of the action items outlined in the white paper.

I want to stress that collaboration has been a hallmark of our work on justice reform. Adopting Mr. Cowper's recommendations, the new act provided for Justice Summits to be held at least once a year. In fact, we have held four Justice Summits in the past 23 months.

These summits address issues of critical importance to the justice system and to stakeholders. Not only do they encourage collaboration among participants across the justice and public safety sectors, but they are forums for discussion on how the system is performing and how it can be improved. We believe in consistent monitoring of our progress, and our Justice Summits have been an effective way to do that.

Our landmark Family Law Act also came into force in 2013. It puts the best interests of children first when families are going through separation or divorce. The Family Law Act recognizes that out-of-court resolution of family law issues is the preferred method of resolving those family law matters. In this way, the new act supports families through a difficult time and gives them more opportunities to resolve their disputes.

We make significant investments, over \$100 million annually, in programs and initiatives designed to increase access to justice. For example, we have 21 family justice centres that are located throughout the province, offering services such as dispute resolution

and mediation as well as needs assessments and referrals. Because going through a family separation is extremely stressful for the moms and dads who need them, the family justice centres and the support they provide can make all the difference to them and to their families.

Our three justice access centres are also helping make a huge difference for clients, helping them to navigate the justice system. We opened the third justice access centre in Victoria in the fall of 2013. It's an innovative, one-of-a-kind facility co-located with the University of Victoria Law Centre. The other two justice access centres are in Nanaimo and Vancouver. These justice access centres are one-stop shops designed to help people manage their legal issues, such as separation and divorce, housing, income assistance and employment disputes.

[1545]

These services work to both increase access to justice and keep disputes out of the courts, reducing court backlogs and giving families access to more affordable legal solutions. We know that they are working. In the last fiscal year over 20,000 people were helped at our justice access centres, and a further 35,000 people were helped at B.C.'s family justice centres.

Just to give you an example of how effective they are, a study at the Vancouver Justice Access Centre last year showed that two-thirds of justice access centre clients do not proceed to court. In other words, they are able to find ways to resolve their disputes outside of the court process. That is an accomplishment, particularly when you consider that one of the challenges identified in the Cowper report was court delays.

Encouraging other paths to legal resolution is one positive step we have taken to reduce the number of cases our courts must hear, but it's only one. Other initiatives we have undertaken include working with the Provincial Court to directly address backlogs. British Columbians don't want to see long waits for cases to be heard and justice to be done, and they certainly don't want to see any case stayed because of delays in getting to trial, so we have done something about that.

Working in consultation with the Provincial Court, a court backlog-reduction project in 2013 added extra sitting days in several communities throughout British Columbia, including Terrace, Kamloops, Kelowna, Port Coquitlam, Surrey, Abbotsford, Nanaimo, Vancouver and Victoria. The project is complete, and I'm pleased to report that it has been successful. Times to trial for criminal matters are now largely within the standards set by the office of the chief judge, and they are the shortest that they have been for almost a decade.

In addition, we have well over 250 justices and judges working in our courts today in British Columbia, and this does not include the more than 25 masters and judicial justices who also provide important judicial func-

tions in our courts.

Taking a broader view, it's clear that things are moving in the right direction in our courts in British Columbia. Over the past 15 years the total number of Provincial Court cases has declined by 28 percent, and over the same period the total number of Provincial Court sitting hours has declined by 19 percent. Those are remarkable statistics.

One of the things that has led to the decline in cases and hours in the courtrooms is the immediate roadside prohibition program. This is probably one of the most successful initiatives that we have undertaken to keep cases out of the courts and keep our streets safer. Our groundbreaking approach in the immediate roadside prohibition program both deters people from drinking and driving and allows police to immediately remove those drivers who are affected by alcohol from our roads. If you blow a fail, you can lose your licence for 90 days, have your vehicle impounded for 30 days and pay all towing charges as well as a \$500 penalty.

We have led the way nationally on tackling this issue, and the results speak for themselves: 227 lives saved and a 54 percent reduction in alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities. British Columbia's IRP laws, the toughest in Canada when they were introduced, will continue to help ensure more British Columbians get home to their families alive.

We have committed to reducing alcohol-related motor vehicle fatalities by 35 percent in three years. That was the commitment — 35 percent in three years. We shattered that goal. Since its inception this program has contributed to an estimated reduction of 6,000 Criminal Code impaired-driving court cases each year, and it has saved, as I said, 227 lives. Over a 3½ year period we've seen an estimated 21,500 Criminal Code cases diverted from the court system to an administrative process as a result of the IRP program. It has been a remarkably successful program.

I spoke earlier about British Columbia's leadership. The rest of the country is watching this one, because the rest of the country is extremely interested in what's going on in British Columbia in this regard.

Transforming our justice system into the most efficient, effective and timely system it can be involves work at all levels in all branches. Every person who works in the system is part of the justice reform process. Our criminal justice branch has been working on a number of projects that, by reorganizing and streamlining processes, are making our system more efficient.

[1550]

For example, the branch has introduced quality control standards that allow for the improved monitoring of prosecution files as they progress through the system, facilitating proactive case management and ensuring that they are ready to proceed to trial at the first available date. The branch has enhanced Crown file owner-

ship where possible so that fewer prosecutors are working on any one file. This kind of continuity means that you have people working on cases who are already familiar and up to speed, which, in turn, goes a distance to minimizing delays. These initiatives may sound minor, but the benefits have a real payoff for the justice system by increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

Our government has made it a priority to address the important issue of domestic violence and, more broadly, to create a violence-free British Columbia. Crown counsel and the criminal justice branch are part of that.

Domestic violence units, with police, government and communities working together, support victims of violence. I have visited some of these units and seen firsthand how they help victims, in some cases in very dangerous situations, to reach safety.

When those cases proceed through to prosecution, they come to the criminal justice branch, where Crown counsel is particularly focused on the safety of the victims and the children when it comes to prosecuting the domestic violence cases. Crown counsel has policies in place to assist them.

The criminal justice branch provides staff with ongoing training around enhancing victim safety. Indeed, all Crown counsel are expected to have the capacity and skill set necessary to prosecute a domestic violence case. Some Crown counsel offices even have dedicated prosecution teams specific to domestic violence cases.

In Surrey, Abbotsford, Vancouver, Port Coquitlam, Duncan and Nanaimo the criminal justice branch has established Crown counsel domestic violence teams to provide better victim support and earlier resolution of cases. This means that one Crown lawyer is responsible for the file throughout the intake stages of the prosecution. In addition, the criminal justice branch regularly offers training and learning opportunities that support effective prosecutions of domestic violence cases.

Criminal justice branch has also implemented a policy which is tailored to vulnerable victims and witnesses and which is responsive to the recommendations from the report of the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry.

This policy will help to ensure that in serious cases vulnerable adult victims and witnesses receive ongoing support from Crown counsel to ensure that they have an equal opportunity to participate in the criminal justice process. This is another demonstration of our government's commitment to ensuring that victims of crime are adequately and effectively supported throughout the criminal justice process.

Let me talk for a moment about legal aid. We have committed to increasing legal aid funding by an additional \$2 million over three years — last year, this year and next year — bringing our total commitment to \$74.5 million for this year. The extra \$6 million over the three years is being used to fund five legal aid pilot pro-

jects, three of which are already underway.

Last fall family legal aid services to low-income people in Victoria and across British Columbia were expanded with these projects. The first saw the funding of a full-time family duty counsel at the Victoria Justice Access Centre to provide clients with meaningful, consistent and timely legal advice and services.

In the second pilot project, the Legal Services Society expanded its Family LawLINE from three to six hours of legal advice on the same issue, with access to the same lawyer for a repeat visit if necessary.

The third pilot provides family mediation referrals to up to six hours to eligible persons who have an issue which was not addressed by the mediation services provided at family justice centres.

We will soon be announcing two more pilot projects: the parents legal centre for child protection cases, to help parents resolve their child protection issues, and an expanded criminal duty counsel, who will support early resolution in less complex legal cases.

Our aim over these three years is to ensure that every British Columbian, no matter who they are, has access to the justice system. These pilot projects expand that access, and they expand it around the province of British Columbia.

[1555]

We've accomplished much in just a few years, but there is more to come. It's my intention and my responsibility to continue the important justice reform work we have done. The next year will see some exciting new developments.

In the coming weeks I will be receiving a newly developed provincial strategy on specialized courts, a strategy that's evidence-based and fiscally responsible and that has been developed in consultation with the judiciary and other justice stakeholders. In British Columbia we already have a number of specialized courts in different areas of the province providing targeted services that respond to community issues.

For example, there are domestic violence court processes in five communities: Nanaimo, Duncan, Kelowna, Penticton and Kamloops. We have First Nations courts in Duncan, New Westminster, North Vancouver and Kamloops. Vancouver has a downtown community court and the drug treatment court, and Victoria has a community-centred integrated court. Our specialized courts help ensure that British Columbia resources are directed towards effective justice solutions.

A year ago, almost to the day, I received the lower Fraser Valley court capacity regional plan, a plan that was the result of our collaboration between five communities and our government that lays the groundwork for development of the courts in one of the fastest-growing areas of British Columbia. The lower Fraser Valley regional plan was designed as a roadmap to increase

access to justice in the most efficient and economical ways possible in the lower Fraser Valley. It's a long-term strategic plan that looks 20 years into the future.

Our government granted the communities of Abbotsford, Surrey, Chilliwack and both the city and township of Langley \$600,000 to develop the plan, and we're now working on realizing many of the goals it laid out. Top priorities identified in the plan are the expansion of the Surrey Provincial Court and later the replacement of the Abbotsford courthouse. These are major capital projects which we are working towards bringing to fruition. When complete, the Surrey and Abbotsford courthouses will be important hubs for essential justice services.

These are major new justice developments that anticipate justice needs for communities far into the future and that will play fundamental roles in these cities for decades to come. We are proud to collaborate with local governments and stakeholders on making our justice system responsive to community needs.

I'll talk for a moment about our administrative tribunals. Our government has demonstrated its commitment to moving forward with the transformation of B.C.'s administrative tribunals, another innovation of which we are proud, which will save taxpayers time and money and will achieve better access to justice. We believe that this can be achieved by making some tribunal services available on line.

We also believe that efficiencies can be achieved through shared resources, shared office space and shared technology. Our plan over the next three to five years is to cluster similar tribunals together to reduce duplication and silos in the administrative justice system.

This was a white paper commitment and is consistent with the goals of government's core review, which is to ensure that we are operating as effectively and efficiently as possible. The end result will be worth the effort. It will mean reduced costs, complexity and delay for tribunal users.

This leads me to the civil resolution tribunal. This is a pioneering piece of work. British Columbia will be blazing a new trail with the civil resolution tribunal. It will be Canada's very first on-line tribunal for resolving strata and small claims disputes.

It will be a user-friendly system for resolving disputes 24-7 to anyone in British Columbia — anyone, anywhere. It's an interactive program that will guide each user to resolution of their legal issue and that will provide information and resources as well. The service focuses on encouraging a collaborative problem-solving approach to dispute resolution, rather than the traditional courtroom model.

Through the civil resolution tribunal, British Columbians will be able to resolve many disputes on line without ever going to court. In fact, they will be able to resolve them without leaving their living rooms. Civ-

il resolution tribunal aims to provide people with the means to access justice when and where they need it and in a manner that fits their lifestyle.

It's an important part of our government's plan to transform and modernize the justice system. We are bringing dispute resolution options to the people and making legal solutions possible wherever British Columbians are. That is innovation.

[1600]

Those are some of the projects and programs we have in the justice system in British Columbia. It's an innovative system. As I said, it's a leading system. It's one that many people across Canada are watching.

Our goal is to make justice in British Columbia accessible, efficient and effective. It gives me great hope and optimism to be able to say that we are doing that through a number of methods, traditional and leading edge, and we will continue to do so. As I have alluded to a couple of times, we are helped by our partners in justice, our partners throughout the justice system, people who come to our justice systems, people who offer us advice. Justice needs to be fair and timely. As Attorney General and Minister of Justice, I intend to make sure that it is.

I'd like to, at this point, express my full and complete support for the Speech from the Throne, for government's commitment to a diverse economy and a prosperous British Columbia.

This speech will be joined next week by the presentation of our third balanced budget. As I have spoken of in the Ministry of Justice, with our goals of access to justice and effectiveness of justice for all British Columbians, we are part of the government's program and plan, as set out in the throne speech, to build a better, more prosperous British Columbia, a place which is good for all citizens of British Columbia.

G. Heyman: It's my pleasure to rise to speak to the amendment to the throne speech. I had planned to speak to the throne speech, but I think the amendment makes some very important points and fits well into the kind of discussion we need to have in this House, an honest discussion, about what ideas the government is putting forward or isn't putting forward.

Let me first start by responding to the first of the Attorney General's two speeches: the short one to the amendment, in which she expressed, in her view, that there was no need for this amendment because the government was putting forward a positive vision for the future — presumably a vision of hope, presumably a roadmap for the future for British Columbia, presumably new ideas about how we can grow our economy.

She went on to speak later in her speech on the throne speech about a government that stood up for a diversified economy. I beg to differ with the Attorney General. It would be lovely to hear a positive vision for

the future in this chamber from this government in a throne speech. It's not just me or my colleagues who don't believe we've heard that in the last few days; it's commentators from around the province.

The truth is that the reason this amendment was moved by my colleague from Coquitlam-Maillardville is because the throne speech is empty. It's devoid of new ideas. It's filled with platitudes. It's filled with the repetition of promises that have been made over and over and over again that have yet to be fulfilled — promises unkept to the people of British Columbia, unless one believes that a promise to balance the budget, no matter what the cost to working families throughout this province, no matter what the cost to their futures, no matter what the cost to their hopes and aspirations, is in fact a promise worth keeping.

It's worse than simply a throne speech filled with platitudes, a throne speech that tries to rewrite history by saying that this government has been committed and has fostered a diversified economy. Everybody in British Columbia, including the business community, knows that unless you were willing to talk about LNG, you couldn't get through the door.

This is a throne speech that is cynically empty. It's a throne speech that doesn't offer hope. It's a throne speech, quite frankly, that could not be better designed to foster disengagement among British Columbia's young people, disengagement amongst British Columbia voters. That is exactly what works in the government's interest. Have British Columbians believe that government is essentially meaningless to them; that government will not do anything to help them fulfil their dreams; that government is irrelevant to building a better society, irrelevant to building a better future.

[1605]

Their hopes and dreams for their children will continue to be sacrificed for the government's friends, for the wealthiest British Columbians, but not in their interests, not in their children's future, not in the interest of building a truly diversified economy that could grow even more jobs. And not in the interest of taking the steps that many people around this province have recommended to this government, whether it be directly in meetings, whether it be in conferences, whether it be in submissions to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. Those entreaties, those hopes and dreams, those ideas for practical, strategic, cost-effective actions are what this government could take to grow the technology sector, could take to grow the clean energy sector, could take to grow the tourism sector, could take to build jobs and a skilled workforce for the future.

It simply has fallen on deaf ears, for whatever reason. It's beyond me. It seems to me that cost-effective investment that diversifies the economy, that builds a future for children, would be a good thing to do, but it appears

that this government, as reflected in this throne speech and as reflected in the last election platform, would rather go for the quick, easy hit — the quick, easy five-second clip — and believe that it will work.

This is a throne speech that pays no attention to the concerns of everyday working families in British Columbia. It's a throne speech, as reflected in the amendment moved by my colleague, that.... Even though we've seen wages fall in British Columbia; even though we've seen a growing gap between the wealthiest British Columbians and everyone else, a gap that exceeds that in other parts of the country; even though we've seen families and individuals continually pay more for services, pay more in fees, pay more in any number of hits to their pocketbook that are filling the void left by this government in the budget by choosing, repeatedly, and particularly in the upcoming budget, to reward their friends, reward the wealthiest 2 percent of British Columbians with \$236 million in tax breaks....

This is a throne speech that has offered no hope to British Columbians, that has not said: "We are going to deal with the rising fees. We are going to deal with the continuous hit on your pocketbooks. We are going to deal with the fact that it is harder and harder for you every day to make ends meet, harder and harder for you every day to see a road map to a prosperous future for yourself, for your children, for your families."

Instead, we get, as we got earlier today during question period from the Minister of Transportation, empty words. We get words that sound good, that sound like what British Columbians want to hear but in fact are baseless. They're baseless in the actions of this government.

The Minister of Transportation said just earlier today that this government was going to keep its promise to residents of Metro Vancouver, that they would have a say over any new taxes and fees. It's beyond me how the Minister of Transportation can claim that. I suppose, if he's focusing it purely on the plebiscite on transit in Metro Vancouver, he is, arguably, keeping an election promise.

Interjection.

[1610]

G. Heyman: I would hope the Minister of Transportation would hear me out. If he is sincere in his belief that British Columbians should have a say over any new taxes and fees, then where is their say over a significant hike in Medical Services Plan premiums? Where is their say in this year's considerable hike in Medical Services Plan premiums that have almost doubled during the term of office of this Liberal government?

They have no say, they've had no say, and they will have no say, because this government would rather give a \$236 million tax break to people who don't need it at

the expense of everyone else in this province.

I say to the Minister of Transportation and to this government: your words are meaningless to everyday British Columbians.

Did the people of British Columbia have a say over the taxes that were needed to support the Port Mann Bridge? Let's not have a discussion here over whether it was a good project or not. Did they have a say?

When the Premier stated, after scribbling some numbers on the back of a napkin and going through a pretty rushed and pretty unsubstantial so-called consultation, that this government was committed to replacing the Massey Tunnel with a new bridge.... A bridge that is yet to be designed, a bridge that she estimated would cost in the neighbourhood of \$3 billion plus — but difficult to put a figure on because it's not a bridge that is going to begin much before the 2017 election.

It's a bridge that doesn't have a design, although it was presented with a photograph of a different bridge. Did the people of Metro Vancouver or British Columbia have a say in the taxes that will be needed to support that? No, they didn't. And they won't, because this government is very good at saying what people want to hear at certain moments about certain issues, but the rest of the time they just do whatever they want.

Let me return to transit. It's not just transit riders in Metro Vancouver who need transit. It's not just transit riders who will benefit from transit. People who are forced to use cars will benefit from reduced congestion.

Studies that were done in Ontario around a proposal to build transit there showed that the cost saving of reducing congestion with their proposals — and this is very interesting, and I hope the Transportation Minister will listen to this — for transit users was in the neighbourhood of \$1,000 a year. This is compared to something like a little under \$200 for a hit on the family for a proposed sales tax increase.

Yet car drivers would save almost double that because they're not idling in traffic, burning gasoline pointlessly, for which they pay and which contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. There's also an overriding provincial interest in reducing congestion in Metro Vancouver, because it is a port centre and commodities from around this province need to come through the port centre and get to port. It's a matter of efficiency.

It has an impact on the economy, just as the efficient movement of people providing goods and services around the region is an economic issue. The Business Council of B.C. estimated that it was in the neighbourhood of billions of dollars that were being lost by not taking action.

Let me return to the point, the point being that the Transportation Minister said that British Columbians will get a say over new fees and taxes. That's why they're voting on a referendum that was ill-advised in the first place, that I and other colleagues and the mayors of

Metro Vancouver criticized but which we're stuck with as the only way to make the necessary investment in transit. But is it necessary?

[1615]

A \$236 million tax break to the wealthiest 2 percent of British Columbians would almost pay for the amount of money that is being proposed to be raised by a sales tax to invest in transit in Metro Vancouver because the Premier and this minister believe that with this one action they can claim to be ultra-democrats and give British Columbians and Metro Vancouver residents a say over new fees and taxes.

If the Transportation Minister means that, if the Premier means that, then let them put that tax break for the rich to a vote of everyone in British Columbia and see what answer we get then.

When I talk to people in my constituency of Vancouver-Fairview, when I meet with seniors, they express to me the limitations on their mobility, the limitations on their quality of life by not having sufficient access to handyDART if they have mobility challenges, by not having sufficient access to home care so that they can remain in their community, in their home, at a lower cost to everyone else in the province.

They talk about, and their children talk to me about, the inadequacy of assisted living and a whole realm of health care services that are important to give seniors quality of life, to support them and their families, which want desperately to take care of them but are struggling with many of their own issues — making ends meet, taking care of their children. Seniors still don't have the flexible options that are needed for home care or assisted living.

When I talk to young people in Vancouver-Fairview or elsewhere, they're concerned. They face uncertain job prospects. They face uncertain job prospects because this government talks a good line about education and training, but they treat it as a zero-sum game. When they promise British Columbians that they will train young people for the jobs that will be needed in the resource sector in this province, they say that it will be at the expense of other sectors for which people need to be educated.

Let me give you an example. I met recently with people in the animation industry, a very successful company that is based both in my constituency of Vancouver-Fairview and in Kelowna. The CEO, the president of this animation company, talked about the low number of students that are graduated from the film school. He said he can hire every single one of them and many, many more, but instead, because he can't hire enough new workers who are trained to meet the concerns of contracts, he actually had to turn contracts away.

Education should not be a zero-sum game. Education should be the investment in our future that we all know it must be. We need to have courage. And this goes

to the positive vision for the future that the Attorney General mentioned. We need to have the confidence in the future that we will do what it takes to invest in the resources that people need, that young people need to be prepared, not just for jobs in LNG or in mining or in construction or in the trades, but for the jobs that we hope to create in the technology sector, the jobs that we can create in digital media, in tourism.

Instead, this government spent almost two years of its term and virtually all of the election campaign talking about one sector only — liquefied natural gas. All of its eggs in one basket, as my colleague from Coquitlam-Maillardville so eloquently stated.

[1620]

We're now rewriting history in a throne speech that, aside from its creative chronicling of a past that never happened and a future that probably never will, talks about a diversified modern economy but has failed to put its money, its energy or its listening ears where the throne speech voice is.

We have a thriving technology sector. We have a technology sector that is doing very well, but we also have a technology sector that could be doing so, so much better. That's why even though the B.C. Technology Industry Association and other groups, like CRED B.C. — who are very bullish on the tech sector — are, quite correctly, right to praise the very successful companies in British Columbia who've done well, they point out the gap between this province and other provinces in Canada as well as states south of the border.

Let me talk a little bit about some of the facts that go along with this. We have a tech sector that has over 84,000 jobs in British Columbia and many more indirect and induced jobs. The technology 2014 report card, which was done for the BCTIA by KPMG, said that compared to other sectors in British Columbia, the tech sector gets an A. That's good news. That is the good news, but unfortunately, against other provinces the mark was a lukewarm C-plus.

The reason for that is our per-capita gross domestic product continues to be lower than in other provinces in Canada with significant technology sectors. As well, our per-capita employment is lower than in provinces with significant technology sectors.

If this government really wants to hold out hope to young people who see a future in a green economy that's centred around clean technology and other technology innovations, as well as the tremendous potential of developing and applying technological solutions to our resource sector that will both increase productivity and have a lower environmental footprint and find ways to sequester carbon as we look for ways to meet our greenhouse gas emission reduction targets....

If this government was serious about it, it would have listened to the recommendations of the B.C. Technology Industry Association as well as the recommendations of

others. It would have studied the report card and outlined in this throne speech some concrete measures to meet the recommendations.

The truth is that, as identified by KPMG and others and the B.C. Technology Industry Association, we are not developing the needed skills and knowledge that we have here in order to allow the tech sector to grow to its fullest potential. B.C. lags other provinces in engineering, science and most other tech-related under- and graduate degrees.

If this government had a positive vision for the future, it would do more than put empty words in a throne speech. It would do more than try to take credit for the success of an industry that is not properly supported by this government — because it isn't LNG. It would in fact have answered the recommendations.

Another point raised by the BCTIA was that we lag in venture capital investment. Now, it is not the job of government or the taxpayer to fully invest in every tech start-up. But it is the job of the government.... This is why people have been so successful south of the border, because whether it's the state of Nevada or Silicon Valley, governments have kick-started investment by demonstrating support for the development of a healthy tech sector, by providing seed capital investment that can be and was leveraged with far greater private sector investment.

We are smaller than some other jurisdictions. But if in fact this government was to demonstrate in a number of ways its commitment by increasing the funding for the B.C. Innovation Council instead of lowering its funding and then flatlining it for several years, as it has....

[1625]

If this government was to provide seed venture capital investment and work with the industry to lobby the federal government for more venture capital investment, then the private sector would look and see that this government didn't just mouth words of support for the tech sector, that this government put its money where its mouth is, that it had a commitment, that it believed in the sector — then that money would come in. That has been demonstrated in other jurisdictions.

Just to prove my point here and just to show what's at stake here, let's hold this up against the government's repetition — frankly, shameless and surprising repetition — of a claim that there are 100,000 jobs in LNG and that we can still be debt-free in B.C. by developing an LNG industry, when everyone else who looks at the sector sees that these claims were outlandish and that even modest progress in developing the LNG industry in B.C. has been put on hold by a number of factors. Yet the government continues to hold out these job numbers.

Let me hold out some other job numbers that are held up by studies and that could be achieved by some targeted support — even half of the targeted support that this

government has indicated it would provide to the LNG industry — for a sector that is already thriving, has been working hard to build itself and could build itself more.

The Technology Industry Association has forecast that this sector could grow to \$50 billion in industry revenue, account for 16 percent of provincial GDP and be at 142,000 jobs. That's almost an additional 60,000 jobs from where we are today in a mere five years, by 2020. However, that is dependent on sufficient venture capital investment and the kinds of actions by government that would support that investment.

Without this venture capital investment, the B.C. Technology Industry Association projects that we will only be at 8 percent of GDP — not 16 percent — in this sector, 30 percent less revenue and a lost opportunity for 31,000 well-paying jobs that are 66 percent above the B.C. industrial average.

Government support sends a message. This government is sending the wrong message by mouthing empty platitudes in a throne speech, by taking credit for actions that it has never actually taken itself, and by offering no new ideas for building real jobs, a real diversified modern economy or any of the other measures that should be the kinds of positive steps, positive actions, positive statements that lead to positive outcomes for British Columbians.

Instead, this government turns its back on British Columbians who are struggling to make ends meet, while rewarding its wealthiest friends, the people in the top 2 percent of income earnings. What could we do with that \$236 million? We could do a lot if that money was invested in transit. According to the government's own figures, the Evergreen line rapid transit project, which is approximately 11 kilometres long, is expected to generate 4,000 direct person-years of employment or, put another way, 850 jobs per kilometre.

If the investments that the Mayors Council has talked about in transit are made, we will create up to 55,000 jobs in the construction phase alone. Instead, we're rolling the dice with a referendum, under the pretence of giving taxpayers a say over taxes and fees, a say they will get on no other measure proposed by this government, when the government has in its own budget the money to actually make this investment, create jobs, help the economy and move British Columbia forward.

[1630]

I could go on, and I will when I speak to the Speech from the Throne. But there are opportunities for investment, not just in transit — investment in building retrofits that create jobs all over the province, investment in incremental and distributed clean energy and projects all over the province that will provide more jobs on a more long-lasting basis than a Site C investment, pushing \$9 billion that will undoubtedly rise over time in one area of the province, creating controversy in a region where people oppose it and alienating First Nations who

are concerned about the project.

There are alternatives, but we have not seen them in this throne speech. We have not seen solutions for families struggling to make ends meet. We haven't seen solutions for young people, for education, for seniors. Instead, we've seen empty words and empty promises.

That's why I support this amendment. That's why I oppose the throne speech as it stands. That's why I reject the assertion of the Attorney General that this is a throne speech filled with a positive vision when, in fact, it is filled with nothing but empty, hot air.

I will now take my seat.

Hon. P. Fassbender: I am rising, of course, to speak in support of the throne speech.

Before I do, I'm going to take a little bit of liberty and thank some people that have been tremendous supporters to me over the years. The first, of course, is my wife, Charlene. We've been married 48 years this year. When I think about that time — how quickly it has gone and how much her support for me throughout my life, in my business career and my political service — she has been amazing, as have been my children, Philip and Steven, my grandchildren, Andrew, Charles and Aidan.

I also want to rise and.... As I mention people that have made an impact on my life, for the last time I'm going to be able to mention my mother-in-law, Dorothy Chevalier, who lived 98 wonderful years. She passed just a couple of weeks ago.

She was the kind of person who, while she was frail in body, was sharp in wit and mind. She used to watch question period all the time. She would phone me afterwards and give me her advice as well. She also had some advice for the members opposite, but I never gave her their phone numbers, which I maybe should have done.

I remember on her 98th birthday I had the honour to be interviewed by Vaughn Palmer on the *Voice of B.C.*, and it happened to be her 98th birthday. I asked Vaughn if he would wish her a happy birthday, and he did in the middle of the program. He wished her happy birthday for 98 years, and he said: "I'd like to talk to you some day to figure out how you've put up with your son-in-law as long as you have."

When you lose someone who has lived a life like my mother-in-law for 98 years, and who was always a contributor to this province through her hard work and the hard work of my father-in-law, who predeceased her by 20 years.... I reflected, as my wife and I were grieving her loss, about what the seniors of this province have done to contribute, to bring us to the place we are, to live in a province that is as beautiful as it is — that has the blessings that we do for our children, our grandchildren and future generations.

As we reflected on that, I shared with my wife, Charlene, that we are fortunate because people made sacrifices during the Depression, following the Depression,

in the war years, in the post-war years leading up to today. Those sacrifices were not small. They lived hard lives. They had challenges in making ends meet during the Depression. They had challenges during the war when husbands and wives went off to serve our country on the battlefields of Europe — and how hard it was for them to go without things that they did.

[1635]

But as I reflect on that, I clearly recognize that things have changed. We live in a much more affluent society today than my parents or my in-laws lived in. But it is because of their hard work and their commitment in their lives to prepare us for what we have today. Not only are we blessed with amazing things and the opportunity to benefit from their hard work; there is a great responsibility that comes with that.

As I start to move into — in a few minutes — my comments about the throne speech, I do that, reflecting on the fact that when you are charged with responsibility to govern and to make decisions, we do need to reflect on those that sacrificed for each and every one of us to be where we are today.

I also want to thank my constituency staff — Brittany Comrie, Carmen Gaisford and Preet Parhar, who help me as an MLA when we are busy in this House and as a minister when I'm busy travelling the province and fulfilling my responsibilities on behalf of the government — for the hard work that they do day in and day out to serve the constituency of Surrey-Fleetwood and a city that I'm proud to be a representative of in one of the ridings in the city of Surrey.

I know that there are many people that come in — people who are living on limited incomes, people who need support from government and government agencies, other social agencies and other organizations in our community. I know how hard they work day in and day out to help those people to find a way to get the support that they need. So I am honoured to have them as my team in the constituency of Surrey-Fleetwood.

I also want to pay recognition today to the new mayor of the city of Surrey, Linda Hepner, and her team on council. They have done some amazing things in the city of Surrey over the years. It is one of the most diverse communities in this province and, I would even venture to say, in the country.

We have 1,000 people a month that move into the city of Surrey. We speak 95 different languages within the city of Surrey. One-third of the population in our community is under the age of 19. And as I said, I see the city of Surrey having a clear vision to build a community that is going to meet the needs of those young people for their future, to build an economy in that community where jobs will be available and where opportunities for an educational journey will be given to them. I know that the council and the mayor are working hard to continue to build on a strong foundation that was laid by

those that went before this term that they're serving.

I also know that the city of Surrey will have a population that will approach one in four people living in Metro Vancouver by the year 2046. And when we think about that, I know clearly that it is a community that needs a clear vision, that needs transportation, that needs educational opportunities, that needs health care facilities to serve that population as they continue to grow.

I am proud to speak to the fact that when it comes to things like arts and culture, again, there are many organizations in the city of Surrey that are working hard in recreation centres, playgrounds and other outdoor facilities and that will help our young population and our growing population to meet the needs that they have. There are so many things that I could speak about that are being done, not by government funding by itself but by the work of the citizens of the great city of Surrey, who are dedicated to working very hard for the future of that community.

[1640]

One of the statistics that I was able to garner is that we have over 10,000 volunteers that work week in and week out in providing support to the community and fulfilling what they know is important.

Our diverse culture in the city of Surrey. I think about events like Vaisakhi and the annual parade that takes place in the city of Surrey, where we have over 200,000 people that come and celebrate the South Asian culture, the wonderful things that we see in that community. I know that because of the work of volunteers, because of the sponsors that get involved in that, we have been able to and will continue to be able to provide festivals like Vaisakhi and the parade free of charge to every citizen.

When I attend those events, I not only see the South Asian community celebrating; I see the rest of the community coming together and celebrating with them. What we celebrate is the diversity we see in culture but also how we work together. We are one community with one goal, and that is to provide a solid foundation and a solid opportunity for people to live their lives in that community.

There are so many things that happen day in and day out because of good planning by the city council, by the other organizations — the Surrey Board of Trade, which is one of the most active in the province of British Columbia in helping to promote businesses that are helping to broaden the diversity of the city of Surrey. And I know that happens throughout this province.

I find it interesting when I hear members opposite talk about how this government has a single focus or a single dream. That is absolutely not true. This government has a very clear vision to diversify our economy, to build on our economy.

Yes, when a generational opportunity comes along, this government is committed to doing everything that

we can to seize that opportunity to ensure we develop it in the best interests of our current generations but more importantly for future generations. I take offence when I hear people saying it's a pipe dream or it's any of those comments that are made. You need to have a vision in order to realize it. You need to go after that vision.

You need to engage partners in that vision. This government, our Premier and the members of this government have worked tirelessly to ensure that we engage partners in the future of British Columbia by creating opportunities for them to come and invest in the future of not only ourselves but, yes, invest in their future, because if we grow, they grow. Together we will provide the economic stability that has brought this province coming up to its third balanced budget because of sound fiscal management, sound fiscal policies, and a clear vision of where we want to go as a province.

We have heard from the members opposite about the fact that we're not doing this, we're not doing that and the throne speech is empty. I challenge every person in this House and every British Columbian to look at the commitments that were made by this government in this current term — and previous governments — that this Liberal government has put forward over the years. To say we have an empty throne speech and an empty plan is, again, a travesty in communication on the part of the members opposite.

The reality is we've had a clear vision. We have a clear vision. We've delivered on it. We've ensured that we have the economic policies to protect that vision but more importantly that every building block in that vision is continuing to grow and to be supported by this government. Everything we do is to the end of providing the opportunities to British Columbians.

[1645]

To suggest that we don't have a vision for transportation.... It was the very government of the NDP who made a decision to take TransLink and form it in Metro Vancouver and to give that responsibility to the local government and to the people of Metro Vancouver. It was that same government that took away the hospital tax from Metro Vancouver that every other region in this province still pays.

I believe that that was done with one objective in mind, and that was to ensure that transportation was seen as a priority in Metro Vancouver and that the region had not only the responsibility but the accountability to ensure that it met those goals.

When I look around the province and at my colleagues from other communities, who are paying hospital tax and are also paying for transportation at the same time, I think the Metro Vancouver region got a deal. We are now saying to them....

It is very important. I was a mayor in the region for quite a few years and sat at the Mayors Council table. I heard other mayors from other communities pooh-

pooh the governance process. They complained about a board that is unaccountable and unelected, and yet it's the very same mayors who sat at the table, who set the criteria for the selection of the board members, who interviewed the selection committee, who set all of those criteria and then voted for every one of those members of the board.

Then some of those same mayors — some to remain unnamed, from Burnaby — I will suggest, stood up and said: "This is a travesty. This is a joke, and I'm not going to participate." So when the vote was taken that particular mayor would get up and leave the room. To me, that's an abrogation of responsibility that was given.

Yet while we were going through the process, those very same mayors that said they were opposed to it and didn't like the structure of the board would then have all kinds of input as to who should be on the board, suggestions of people they felt should be on the board, but then they wouldn't vote for it. I never was able to figure that out, and to this day I still can't.

What did we do as a government? What did the Minister of Transportation deliver in the last sitting of the House? What he delivered was a governance restructure that put the Mayors Council on the board of directors to have an active voice, to be able to go back to their table and report on decisions that the board of directors was making.

To me, that was a very positive move to ensure that the mayors had to live up to their responsibility and be accountable. I do applaud the majority of the mayors around the table who have worked very hard to articulate the vision, to quantify that vision, to prioritize the issues that need to be dealt with in Metro Vancouver and have brought that forward.

They were the ones that made the recommendation on how the funding should go. Again, the Minister of Transportation and this government worked with them and brought forward the legislation to bring that forward. Now we hear: "Well, if you allow the people of Metro Vancouver to have a say, why don't you do that on every tax that you are thinking about in the province?"

Well, it was clear in the last mandate, in the last election as part of the platform of this government, that we were going to give the people of Metro Vancouver a clear vision through the mayors, working with them, but then we were going to give them the opportunity to have a say on that particular issue. The Minister of Transportation has never said — I've never heard him say — that we should do that on every tax policy. We would never get anything done because the members opposite would drag out the debate so long, we'd never make any decisions.

[1650]

Governments are elected to govern, but in this particular case we made a commitment. We said to the people of Metro Vancouver: "If you want more, we're prepared

to give it to you, but you have a say."

When I was sitting around that table, I had many people many times come to me, as a sitting mayor, and say to me: "I need this. I need that. I need these things when it comes to transportation." Whether it's more infrastructure.... It isn't just about rapid transit. It's about the road network. It's about all of those things. They would say to me: "I need more."

Students would come and say: "I need more access to reliable, frequent transportation so that I can get to the educational institutions of my choice in a way that will assist me and save me money — where I don't need a car, don't need to pay insurance — through transit and through a transportation system that meets our needs." The question that I always asked: "How would you propose we pay for it?"

The mayors were clear, when I was sitting around the table, that they did not want to increase property taxes. I did not necessarily support that position. I believe that with the savings we had on the hospital tax, the people of Metro Vancouver could contribute more through that. Around that table I was one of the lone voices who said I was prepared to look at that.

I'm okay with that. That's what democracy is really all about. But that's why we felt, as government, that it was absolutely critical to give the people of the region a choice.

I will say this: I am going to vote, and I am going to advocate for the referendum, the plebiscite. I'm going to vote for the 0.5 percent. I know there are challenges that are attached that we're hearing from some of the no-vote people. But I know this. The people of Metro Vancouver — if they want more bus service, if they want more handyDART, if they want more rapid transit, if they want roads fixed, if they want more bicycle networks, if they want more opportunities to move goods and services — are going to have to make a decision.

I also know this. If they don't vote yes for the referendum.... And I hope that they do. I hope they say: "We have a say, and we know that every penny that is going to be collected is going to go to pay for the expansion of transportation in the Metro region."

But if they were to vote no, and I sincerely hope they don't, then the mayors of Metro Vancouver have a decision. That is to use the other tools, like property tax, that are in their toolbox in order to fund the things that they know Metro Vancouver needs.

I am going to support that. I'm going to vote yes and, without any hesitation, stand up and say that I want people in Metro Vancouver and in my communities to vote in favour of the referendum.

Our throne speech, in some people's view, was devoid of substance. What it was, was not that at all. It was a clear statement that the plan that we have continued to present from the day we were elected to today is being fulfilled — all of the economic platforms that we have

brought forward, the measures in this House to move things forward, and not just on LNG. On mining. On forestry. On tourism. And I could go on. On technology.

We heard the member across the way talk about technology. I have never seen a technology sector be as excited about the support that they get from this government. I have never seen anything like that in the history of this province. That is because we do support them. We've seen the growth, because this is a safe haven for young start-ups to invest their time and their energy and their resources. They know they have the best chance for success.

[1655]

Companies that have decided to come here.... Sony, Microsoft, all of these people who are coming to the city of Vancouver in the province of British Columbia; Disney, who is active in the interior, in Kelowna — these people are investing because they say British Columbia is stable, it's secure, and it has a clear economic vision and plan. That's what the throne speech talked about. It clearly reinforced the vision, the plan that we have had and what we know is going to move this province forward.

We talk about investments. I'm going to talk about the city of Surrey again. But it's only an example of a community where, for example, since 2001 we've invested more than \$290 million for 49 capital and seismic projects and 12 site acquisitions for educational growth in the city of Surrey.

We've invested millions upon millions of dollars in our health care system through the expansion of Surrey Memorial Hospital and the work that has been done with the Jim Pattison Outpatient Centre. We have invested in the needs of that community when it comes to education, when it comes to health care, when it comes to social services. We've been working with all of the other agencies in that community.

But do you know what? I can look around the room to every member who represents a constituency in this province. What we have done, whether it is held by the government or not, is we have invested in those communities for the future.

On Vancouver Island, in Langford and communities like that. When you see the expansion in our educational institutions, our health care facilities.... We invest where the people are, where the growth is and where we know the future needs that support. That is because we have a sound fiscal plan. We have a sound vision for the future of the province of British Columbia.

I look at communities like Vancouver. We worked very hard, and I want to congratulate the new school board. I want to congratulate the new chair of the Vancouver school board. We are working hard to work with them to meet the needs of the city of Vancouver and the Vancouver school district.

Recently, before the civic elections, we were able to

establish a Vancouver project office to ensure that the priorities and the issues that the Vancouver school district face are met in a way where we can get to those issues, we can identify them, and we can put a plan together.

The Vancouver project office is a jointly run office between the Vancouver school board and the Ministry of Education to do everything we can to fast-track the priority projects. I'm happy to report that that office has been established. They are hiring the person who is going to be the manager of that office and is going to look after all of the issues that it will have to deal with. The partnership between the Vancouver school district and the province of British Columbia is going to ensure that we meet the needs in that community as well.

I'd be remiss if I made my remarks today and didn't talk about a couple of things that deal directly with the Education portfolio that I'm honoured as to serve as the minister. I heard a lot, as we were going through what has been said to be the longest teachers' strike in the history of the province of British Columbia.

It was a necessary process to go through to get to the place where the teachers of the province of British Columbia clearly recognized that the government was prepared to give them a fair increase, to ensure that they were treated fairly but, at the same time, that we balanced the economic priorities of the province and ensured that the taxpayers' interests were done as well.

At the heart of the whole process was a desire on the parts of ourselves and, I believe, the teachers of the province to have a stable environment, and we achieved that — a historic agreement that's going to allow us to move ahead.

[1700]

I know that we still have lots of work to do, but I also know that the investment through that agreement — in the learning improvement fund, in a number of other elements that we added to it — was very important. I am proud to say that we are working hard to build a new relationship. We are going to work with the teachers of this province, with the parents of this province and with business and industry to create the opportunities for students that will allow them to realize their dreams, to be prepared to go into the world, to get jobs, to be successful. That is at the heart of everything that we as government have strived to achieve, and I know that we are going to realize those dreams for every young person.

With that, I know the vision that we have and that is reflected in the essence of the throne speech is something that is going to move British Columbia into the next century as a leader in the world on every front.

B. Ralston: I rise to speak to the amendment to the Speech from the Throne, which reads as follows. I think it's probably helpful just to focus the attention of the

assembly on the amendment itself:

“and that the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia regrets that families in the province have seen their wages fall as they pay more for their basic services while the government gives a break to the highest 2 percent of income earners; regrets that the government has failed to meet its commitment that all British Columbians will have access to a general practitioner by 2015; regrets that seniors still do not have flexible options for home care or assisted living; regrets that young people in the province face uncertain job prospects, as the government has bet on one sector rather than working with businesses and workers across B.C. to reach their potential; and regrets that the government will not fulfill its commitment for at least one LNG pipeline and terminal online in B.C. by 2015.”

Now, before I begin my speech, I do want to make a couple of comments just about the honour that I have to represent Surrey-Whalley. I've lived in Surrey and in the riding for 28 years. My children have attended local public schools. It's a warm, generous community. People are helpful to each other. People are not afraid to express their opinions to me, and I do my best to reflect and bring forward the diverse opinions of people in Surrey-Whalley.

It's an area that's undergoing a lot of transformation. Certainly, the new city centre, after being thought of and on the books for decades, is really beginning to take off. I think the important decisions of having rapid transit come there and moving the university to the city centre have really begun to catalyze the kind of growth that people are looking for. Certainly, there is new residential growth, and there is also new business growth and office towers that are coming to the city centre. All of that bodes well for the future.

I think in the Lower Mainland it'll be clear that the city centre in Surrey will become an alternate polarity to downtown Vancouver and in fact be the focus of much business activity, cultural activity and generally fulfil all the functions of a thriving and vibrant downtown place that planners dream of and citizens look forward to.

I do want to talk a little bit about the throne speech itself that has brought forward this necessary amendment, because there is in the throne speech what I would call a retreat from the grandiosity of previous throne speeches. Certainly, there's a recognition of the economic reality, and it's interesting to hear the previous member say that there was not a singular focus of government.

Indeed, the Premier and many of the cabinet ministers have said that all of the government departments were yoked together to deliver on what they called the LNG opportunity. There was a very determined focus on LNG, and there continues to be, perhaps to a lesser extent. Certainly rhetorically, the tone has declined rather dramatically.

To now suggest that the B.C. Liberals have always favoured, in their economic policy, a diversified economy, when that was far from what they talked about over the last several years, is really a bit hard to take. But it does show the effortless leap that the Premier is able to make from one position to another without worrying about any of the inherent contradictions in doing that.

Certainly, the LNG opportunity presents itself. I'm the official opposition spokesperson for LNG development. I've visited and spoken with and continue to be in touch with people in Kitimat and in Prince Rupert, speak to proponents. I've been at the proposed Wood-fibre site as well. Certainly, there is the possibility of an opportunity there.

I think most people now recognize the reality — the government, I think, has belatedly come to this reality — that the time horizons for these kinds of decisions are very long. Indeed, that's the position that David Keane, who's the president of the B.C. LNG alliance, who represents most of the major LNG proponents in the province — with one or two exceptions, which I'm sure he's working on to have them join.... It's a long time horizon.

There may well be a decision, but a lot of what takes place in global marketplaces is completely beyond the control of any politician or any government. Some of those opportunities may not materialize.

What we on this side have said is that in order to support the LNG opportunity, what we are in favour of, firstly.... The Leader of the Opposition, the member for Juan de Fuca, has made this very clear. We support it, providing that four principles are considered.

One is that first priority for good-paying jobs and training opportunities go to British Columbians. Some of the proponents, particularly.... I won't name them here, but some of the proponents seem to feel that it's better, and it's their standard practice globally, to import their workers from other countries, typically their country of domicile, to construct projects anywhere in the world.

We have made it very clear that we don't support that approach. Certainly, some temporary foreign workers for very highly skilled positions that are not present here in British Columbia — for example, the ability to do underwater pipeline construction, which is a very specialized trade — will probably come from somewhere other than British Columbia. But, for the most part, British Columbia should be providing workers and should be providing the apprentices that will work not only during the construction phase but during the life of these projects.

My leader has made it very clear that we stand foursquare for a fair return to British Columbians. We want First Nations to be recognized as full partners in the economic opportunity that LNG presents. And the best and cleanest air, land and water must be paramount

in any decisions that are made to proceed with projects.

Now, that doesn't mean that these projects are without challenges and that residents don't have legitimate concerns about some of the projects. Certainly, there are some serious environmental concerns about some of the projects that are proposed in the Pacific Northwest, and those of us on this side have expressed those. But there is an opportunity there.

While the Minister of Natural Gas sometimes likes to build a few straw men and then huff and puff and blow them down, the reality is different. I hope I've expressed our position on LNG development clearly.

It's very clear that the government now realizes that some of the overheated rhetoric which was probably politically convenient during the election is no longer the political reality or the economic reality, and they've been obliged to refocus.

[1710]

This Speech from the Throne, I think, is an effort to refocus, although it's probably notable for its use of the cut-and-paste function. Many of the paragraphs are taken almost verbatim from previous throne speeches. We've seen the revival in this throne speech of the so-called B.C. jobs plan, complete with the same distortion of the number of jobs created.

In the throne speech the actual words are: "In September 2011 your government introduced the B.C. jobs plan. Since then more than 70,000 jobs have been created." It's actually 49,700 net new jobs between September 2011 and January 2015.

They choose, and they continue to choose, to begin the job count one month earlier, before the plan was even announced, because there was a statistical blip. There were a number of jobs in August, and so it inflates the numbers dramatically to include August, although the jobs plan was announced in September 2011.

I think that's just plain simple distortion. I pointed it out when I was Finance critic, and we debated this with then Minister Bell. It's still there. I guess it is just hard to change the boilerplate in the cut-and-paste, but it's just wrong. It's not factual.

It gives some sense of, I suppose, the desperation or the degree to which the government has retreated to rhetoric that it's more comfortable with. It's used it in the past, and it seemed to have fulfilled the task at hand, which is filling up 30 minutes of a throne speech.

This throne speech was notable for repeating the eight sectors not once but twice: once to recapitulate and say what had happened in each sector, and then a second recitation of the eight parts as to what was going forward in order to, I think, probably eat up some time in a throne speech.

[Madame Speaker in the chair.]

What does the throne speech offer? That's really the nature of the amendment that I am speaking to. What

does it offer to British Columbians? British Columbians probably don't pay a lot of attention to the throne speech and probably, in this case, for very good reason. When they come to consider what's going on in the economy, what's happening in British Columbia, people's views are conditioned by their own situation, of course.

Average British Columbians are feeling squeezed. They're feeling jammed. That's not surprising when you look at some of the statistical evidence that supports that intuitive and emotional feeling. Wages have been stagnant. Inflation adjustment median income fell 2.4 percent between 2006 and 2012.

Good jobs for young people, particularly, are hard to find. Andy Yan at Bing Thom Architects, who is very deft and proficient with statistical analysis, says that greater Vancouver ranks dead last among ten metropolitan cities in Canada when it comes to median incomes for those between the ages of 25 to 55 with bachelor degrees or greater.

The average person has felt their median income decline. Young people coming out of college or university have the lowest median income of any city in Canada, according to Andy Yan, who is quite reliable. Is it any wonder that people wonder and feel jammed about their present economic situation?

In addition, the singular focus of the government upon LNG, the LNG opportunity, has meant that they really haven't spent the time focusing on some of the real structural weaknesses of the British Columbia economy. Jock Finlayson at the B.C. Business Council has a measure which he calls export intensity. And B.C. is, by that measure, doing not very well.

B.C. is still very heavily reliant upon low-value commodity exports. The measure of export intensity — we export just under \$19,000 worth of goods and services per capita, far behind every other province except Nova Scotia, P.E.I. and Quebec. According to the statistics, we were in seventh place for exports per capita in 2013.

[1715]

And that's Jock Finlayson of B.C. Business Council. This is not some left-wing oracle by any means. This is the Business Council of...

Interjection.

B. Ralston: Well, maybe for some members opposite, the B.C. Business Council is left-wing. I know there are divisions inside the B.C. Liberal caucus. I'm sure that makes for interesting caucus meetings, if you're allowed to speak your mind there.

Oh, to be a fly on the wall in a B.C. Liberal caucus meeting — if I could stay awake.

Interjections.

B. Ralston: It seems like I've captured the essence of

the debate, Madame Speaker. They seem to be responding.

Madame Speaker: Members.

B. Ralston: In addition, another economic measure is the trade deficit. Speaking of British Columbia measured exports against imports, British Columbia has a large and growing trade deficit. In 2013 British Columbia imported \$21.8 billion more in goods and services than we exported, a deficit worth 8.7 percent of the provincial GDP. This has grown from a deficit of about 3.8 percent in the 1990s. The source of that is the government agency, B.C. Stats.

These are real challenges. These are not easy problems to solve. When you focus the effort of government, as the Premier and the cabinet have done, on one opportunity, you neglect a number of others.

Certainly, that's what we have heard as we, as spokespersons for different sectors of the economy, go out and meet with people. People in those sectors express some frustration about being able to get attention of government to their sector and to grapple or deal with the problems that individual sectors have. They all have them, and they all have challenges.

It's, I think, a bit surprising that, I suppose, in a very determined defence of the Speech from the Throne, members opposite speak of a vision or speak of a plan. What's clear is that the government is in full retreat from the grandiose notions that they had not so long ago and have reverted back to the so-called jobs plan — which at one point placed British Columbia ninth among Canadian provinces in private sector job creation.

Maybe now that Alberta has encountered some difficulties as a result of the collapse of the price of oil, and Saskatchewan to a lesser extent, perhaps it's moved up a few notches and some of the statistics have been recast by Stats Canada. Perhaps there's some statistical improvement. But the reality is that the plan, for what it was, wasn't adhered to and wasn't a success. Yet that's the main focus of the Speech from the Throne — to go back to that plan.

People in my riding.... I spoke of the average British Columbian feeling squeezed. Not so long ago, a couple of weeks ago, I went to lunch at the Oak Avenue Neighbourhood Hub, a seniors lunch. Most of the participants were senior women, there for a lunch that was provided.

In addition, the staff told me that they'd made arrangements with Safeway that on the weekends they pick up the baked goods that are surplus, that are dated, and bring them to Oak Avenue Neighbourhood House to distribute on the Monday. The food bank is not open on Saturday and Sunday, so they don't have the capacity to pick up that kind of produce and bread and things like that that are surplus.

These are not people who've done anything wrong.

These are not people who have drug addictions. There are no culpable poor there. These are people who are simply struggling — largely seniors, single women, often widowed — to make ends meet. I talked with a few of them.

[1720]

One said, with a very exasperated and weary tone, that most of her pension income went to pay her rent. On how she made ends meet, she said: "Some months I really don't know." She went away with a bag full of some of this bread and other goods that were given to her.

Yes, some people are doing well. Yes, the economy is prospering in some sectors. But many people are not. Certainly, in my riding, where the median income is below average, people are proud, but they're struggling. I think it's worth bearing in mind when we come to consider some of these more highly charged statements that we hear from members opposite.

There are other sectors that, for example, my colleague from Vancouver-Fairview has spoken of: the technology sector. I know that the new minister, having done a smashing job in the advanced education field, I am sure will be able to replicate the same degree of success as the Minister of Technology. That's certainly what people are hoping for. But I fear that — and this is the concern expressed by people in the sector — he really is not the right person to deal with this sector.

There are huge opportunities. My colleague from Vancouver-Fairview spoke of CRED, Conversations for Responsible Economic Development. He attended a forum that they had on Tuesday night in Vancouver. They've given a document here. They say.... I'm not sure that everyone would agree with this, but this is their calculation of the value and the economic input of their sector:

"Technology contributes more to B.C.'s wealth and employment than all of the traditional resource-based sectors — oil and gas, mining, fisheries, forestry, utilities — combined. Clusters of expertise in areas from visual effects to biotechnology have sprung up, mostly in Vancouver but increasingly in places like Surrey, Kelowna, Kamloops and even the Comox Valley. It's easy to see why it's more cost-effective to set up shop in Canada than the U.S. B.C. is time-zone-friendly to the Silicon Valley, and the swim-and-ski lifestyle here is enticing to employees."

They see huge potential here. Indeed, there are many firms that are growing. They speak of the D-Wave quantum computing company and TZOA, a wearable environmental tracker. There's Hootsuite, of course. There are a number of others. But what they do point out, and my colleague from Vancouver-Fairview has pointed this out as well, is that there is an opportunity to grow this sector in a real way, without some of the challenges that may face the LNG industry, by some concentrated attention from government.

One of the things they talk about is improving access to private capital. There was just \$97 million of venture capital invested in the B.C. tech industry in 2014, compared to \$201 million of angel funding. Angel funding is private sector funding. The small business venture capital tax credit is mentioned, but there's a wish and a desire that that program be enhanced.

The industry leaders, when interviewed about what the government can do, spoke of the importance of the B.C. Innovation Council, which supports a network of accelerators throughout the province. Indeed, I toured one about a year and a half ago in Kelowna. I gather that that one has now opened and perhaps got a little bit more government support to get going, because there is a real, thriving hub in Kelowna.

There are things that the government could do, in the scale of some of the capital investments that are being contemplated in other industries, for a relatively small amount of government revenue and make a real difference — create real jobs in a sector that's growing, where you have talented people, you have the web and connection of universities, where you have a good start-up, an accelerator environment. There's just huge potential there.

[1725]

That's one sector where the government has chosen to kind of nibble around the edges but not really make the same kind of commitment that it could make in the same way that it has made — although now it's somewhat resiling from that — in the LNG sector. That's, I think, one area that could be focused on.

Certainly, there are lots of people that are willing to talk to people in public life about what they think would be the best solutions. Rather than a throne speech devoid of ideas, there are people out there who are bubbling with ideas, who have great ideas to bring to government, to bring to the economy, that will make this place a much more prosperous and better place.

Why the government isn't pursuing that, I don't know. I think, as they have said up until very recently, their singular focus has been on the LNG opportunity. As important as they may feel that is, it's important to recognize a diversified economy in other ways than simply rhetorical. The government has yet to demonstrate that.

Now, the other area that I do want to talk a little bit about in the time that I have — I'm not sure I have much time left — is trade. I'm also the critic for International Trade. The minister made a very brief speech here earlier this afternoon.

There are some opportunities. The free trade agreement that has been signed with Korea is an important one. I agree with the minister in the sense that there is the diversity of the British Columbia population. There is a community of Canadians who have origins and strong ties to Korea, and there are huge opportunities.

This free trade agreement is one that we on this side of the House support wholeheartedly for a number of reasons. It's with a country that has a strong and mature democracy. It has an active and organized labour movement. It has an ambitious national strategy for green growth which has won plaudits from around the world, and it has some important differences from other trade agreements.

The Korean FTA doesn't apply to provincial, territorial or municipal procurement. It doesn't affect negatively supply-managed agricultural sectors. It does not contain any negative intellectual property provisions. Indeed, it has been lauded as a model agreement by Michael Geist, a person who's very knowledgeable in copyright law. And it's cancellable on six months notice, not like FIPA, which lasts for 31 years, and CETA, which lasts for 20 years.

There are real opportunities there. The Americans signed a free trade deal with Korea a couple of years ago. They've got the advance. Their trade with Korea has grown. Canadian trade with Korea has diminished, so this agreement will redress the balance. There are huge opportunities there. Korea is the fourth-largest market for B.C. products. Particularly, there are opportunities in agriculture and food export and, generally, in value-add.

So the opportunities are great there. That's why we support the agreement. I think many are anticipating the business opportunities and future prosperity that will come to this jurisdiction and to Canada because of that agreement.

China trade looms large, although I think the challenge for British Columbia in dealing with China is that most of our exports are low-value exports, typically commodities. Those are good things if you are in the commodity sector and if you gain your employment from extracting commodities. But the challenge, I think, in the trade with China is to expand our trade beyond coal, beyond sulfur, beyond raw logs, as important as those are to some sectors. And clearly, the economy does earn revenue from that.

The other area is India. I recently was in India on a self-funded, self-guided trade mission, along with a little bit of a holiday. The challenges — I met with the trade representative in Chandigarh, the B.C. trade office. They have a room in the Canadian consul general's office in Chandigarh.

[1730]

The opportunities there are huge, but the challenges in India are equally huge as well. I suppose, it's an object lesson in public policy failure in some respects.

The public school system, for example. Unlike other BRIC countries — whether it's Brazil or China or even the former Soviet Union — a robust, public education system was not developed. To some extent, India continues to suffer because of that. Literacy rates are low.

When you're trying to achieve economic growth, you butt up against those kinds of problems very, very quickly.

The infrastructure challenges in India are huge, but the opportunities are equally huge as well. Again, we have important cultural and personal connections with parts of India — obviously, the Punjab. But increasingly, immigrants come to British Columbia from other parts of India as well. So I'm optimistic about the trade opportunities there.

Before I.... It looks like I'm going to have to close very soon. One thing I did want to mention was a local issue, which is the regulation of recovery homes, particularly in my riding.

Madame Speaker: Thank you, Member.

B. Ralston: Unfortunately, I'm out of time.

Hon. A. Wilkinson: It's a pleasure to stand here today in the throne speech debate and to update the House, really, on what I've learned about the strong state of advanced education in this province.

Since taking this position on December 17, 2014.... I've only once had to listen to the coughing of the member opposite. I'm sure that'll continue. It's been an opportunity to travel and visit the 25 post-secondary institutions in British Columbia. I have now been to 22 of the 25 and seen the pleasure in the faces of the students across the province.

I've made a point of sitting down with the students in each of the institutions — in the absence of what I call "management" — and listening to the clients, the market, the people who we do this for, to learn their impressions and to hear their concerns. It's a pleasure to be able to relate to this House that the vast majority of those students say they are getting what they bargained for. They're getting the education that they want and need, and they are looking forward to a prosperous future.

These are not self-selected students or students that have been put forward by the administration of these institutions as their best students. These are a cross-section. In many cases they are representatives of the student union or the student association who are known for having strong forward-looking and, perhaps, slightly self-serving views.

Nonetheless, they are all stating that the education they are receiving is of top quality and it's a fine investment made by the people of British Columbia. This ministry invests about \$1.9 billion per year, \$5.3 million a day, into advanced education in these 25 institutions, and it works.

What I am going to do today is actually go over some of the statistics that summarize the state of higher education in this province, which are actually diagnostic of the strong state of the economy and the strong state of

education in this of province.

There's been mention in the past few days of a Conference Board report that pointed out the need to train more of our young people, and sometimes our not-so-young people, for the jobs of tomorrow. We have taken that report to heart, because it actually reflects the work that our ministry has done in the last two years to come up with the jobs plan.

We've identified 60 occupations which will be in demand over the next decade, leading to one million jobs in those 60 occupations. About two-thirds of that cohort of a million workers will be replacing people who are retiring. The other third will be coming into new industries, whether it's in technology, in LNG or in things we haven't even thought of yet.

This represents an opportunity to raise the skill level of our entire population and to basically empower individuals of all ages to increase their opportunities for success in life. This is a very exciting role to be in, and I'm proud to have taken it on.

We launched the British Columbia skills-for-jobs blueprint in April of 2014 to align education and training with these occupations that are in demand. The blueprint is very much data-driven. It's demand-driven, and it includes \$4.4 million allocated to new trades-training equipment at 14 of these institutions I've visited. They are delighted to get replacement equipment so that they can actually be working in state-of-the-art occupations in fields as varied as instrumentation at Northern Lights College through heavy duty mechanics at Okanagan College and the culinary programs in various parts of the province.

[1735]

We've allocated \$6.8 million to reduce wait-lists in these high-demand LNG-related trades, including 1,424 foundation apprenticeship seats at 14 public post-secondary institutions. Once again, this is paving the road for the young people of today to be successful tomorrow.

We've provided \$40 million in targeted funding for student financial aid grants for in-demand occupations. This provides as much as \$16,000 in grants for an individual to go and train in a location that they otherwise wouldn't have gone to. For instance, if there's an empty spot at Northwest Community College.... An individual from Kelowna didn't get into the program they want to in Kelowna. They can be provided with substantial travel grants and subsidies to take them to the training where it is available.

We now find that 25 percent of our public post-secondary institutions are in a position to receive operating grants. They'll be targeted in the next three years for these in-demand programs. We're now profiling about 25 percent of our funding in that direction.

We sometimes hear: "Is this going to compromise or reduce the funding for the kind of arts and science pro-

grams that many of us went through?” Well, the answer is no. We have 75 percent of our funding still reserved for what I call general education and the professions. This is mostly done to universities or to colleges with universities transfer programs. This is the general education that brings all of our public into a more employable state. It doesn’t necessarily lead to a specific operation, but so many of us know that that kind of training leads to a broader worldview, a more educated population and opens up opportunities that we never thought of.

In addition, we’ve decided to invest \$185 million over three years in infrastructure and equipment for skills and trades training. This is starting to roll out now. [Applause.]

Of course, those who applaud tend to recognize, for instance, the Northern Lights College investments that are going on. One never knows. Perhaps it will be rewarded further, proportional to the amount of applause.

In any case, we’ve also allocated \$7.5 million to support aboriginal community-based education training. This is actually a critical point, which I’ll return to at greater length in a few minutes.

We have \$1.5 million allocated to public post-secondary institutions to pilot innovative training initiatives to increase the success of persons with disabilities. We all know that if we can take a population that has faced employment challenges or doesn’t have the capacity to perform any profession or role, then we can up their skills and make sure that they’re maximally employable, given their abilities. This is an exciting prospect for many people who’ve been marginalized in the workplace.

The upshot of this is we’re investing in talent. This party believes that British Columbians have a world of opportunity ahead of them and what we have to do is to invest in our own people to increase their skills, to make sure they have the abilities and the talents that will lead them to productive employment in the future and to build the economy and, of course, to move from that position of being an employer to being a manager and, one would hope in many cases, to opening their own business so that they become the employers of the future. That is why we seek to make the skill set of our British Columbia population fully optimized — so that they can succeed in the future.

We’ve also, of course, since 2001, added 32,000 student seats. That’s far beyond the growth of the population, proportionally. And we’ve named seven new universities, converting them from other institutions, such as Capilano College becoming Capilano University. The Emily Carr School of Art and Design was changed to university status, as was Kwantlen Polytechnic. Thompson Rivers University came from, of course, Cariboo College.

UBC Okanagan has been a stunning success after some community uncertainty about whether this is the path they wanted to go. They were concerned about being a branch plant of the Point Grey campus in Vancouver. But it has turned out to be a smashing success — with full enrolment, a great deal of community satisfaction and involvement, and of course, the fully developed brand of a full-on university in Kelowna in addition to Okanagan College, which has a very complementary role there.

I’m anticipating applause from the member from Okanagan-Mission, but I’m perhaps not rewarded instantaneously.

In any case, we also have the University of the Fraser Valley and Vancouver Island University, which are prospering.

Having visited all of these institutions in the last three weeks, I can report back to this House that they are in fine shape, with high-performing faculty and very satisfied students.

[1740]

Now, the issue comes up, in visiting students.... I always ask them: “Are you getting what you bargained for? Is this what you need for the future?” The second question I ask them is: other than money — which all students feel they don’t have enough of and worry about, as all of us did — what’s the thing that worries them beyond money? Inevitably the conversation comes back around to the affordability of post-secondary education.

This government has been very clear in maintaining a cap on tuition growth of 2 percent per year since 2005. This grinds on the nerves of the administrations of these institutions, who would like to raise tuition higher. We tell them that is not acceptable. We will maintain that tuition increase cap through the remainder of our election term.

Now, it’s interesting to note that British Columbia, in fact, has the fourth-lowest tuition in Canada. We often hear about comparables. Quebec has very low tuition and has very large class sizes, very large dropout rates and declining quality on almost any metric. British Columbia has found the appropriate balance by charging moderate levels of tuition with a cap on the growth of tuition while maintaining quality.

It’s also interesting to note that across the country we’ve found that our students are actually better off than most, in that 70 percent of our students go through the system with no student debt. They turn to their parents. They work part-time. They find ways to fund their education. In my visit with the students at these 22 institutions, it’s become clear that this generation is generally quite debt averse, even though we have historically low interest rates. It is remarkable to meet these students who say, come hell or high water, that they will not leave their training with any debt because they intend to invest in their own future and come out with a clear bal-

ance sheet, ready to prosper in the future.

Our students actually pay about one-third of the cost of their post-secondary education, and the remainder is paid through a variety of other mechanisms, including some federal funding, research funding and the amounts that we pay on behalf of the taxpayers, which amount to about 45 percent of the cost of maintaining our post-secondary system of education.

We have a comprehensive student financial aid program that helps more than 70,000 students a year, and students receive approximately \$53 million in targeted grants, including \$30 million through the B.C. completion grant that benefits 24,000 students each year. We believe that this is a comprehensive plan to build the skills for the future so that these individuals can get the jobs they want, start their own businesses and lead the kinds of prosperous lives that we were fortunate enough to, being born in an era that provided us with the incomes and the growth and the security that we have found. We are doing our level best to make sure that the next generation has that same opportunity.

Now, in terms of aboriginal education, I had a compelling and quite moving visit to the Nicola Valley Institute of Technology, which many of us are not familiar with. This is in Merritt. It is aboriginal governed, it is aboriginal taught, and it is aboriginal maintained. The five Nicola Valley First Nations got together in 1983 and put together this institution, and since then, for 30 years or more, it has been managed by an entirely aboriginal board. What it does is provide the outreach to aboriginal communities all over the province to ensure that they have an educational opportunity that is approachable, that is welcoming, and that they do not feel that they are having to cross a cultural and socioeconomic divide and become lost in the post-secondary system that so many of us have benefited from.

At the same time, every one of our post-secondary institutions, other than the one that has it under construction, has an aboriginal gathering place. There are aboriginal students in every one of our institutions around the province because they have come to the conclusion, the younger people, that they want to be fully involved in this economy, maximize their skills and seek the prosperity that they expect as British Columbians. We, of course, are doing everything we can to assist them in that goal.

We have more than 3,000 credentials awarded to aboriginal students in two fiscal years ago, an increase of 17 percent in the previous four years. Our aboriginal post-secondary education training framework and action plan was developed in collaboration with aboriginal First Nations throughout the province to improve outcomes for aboriginal students.

Our ministry invested \$14.4 million in the creation of 30 aboriginal gathering places at our public institutions around the province over the last decade, and \$19

million has been invested to date to support partnerships between aboriginal communities and these post-secondary institutions through an aboriginal community-based delivery partnership program. Up to \$4.4 million is used annually for aboriginal service plans at 11 of these post-secondary institutions.

[1745]

The goal here is not to provide a separate educational system; it's to provide the on-ramp to the freeway of life. Our aboriginal students are prospering by taking advantage of these opportunities. They are finding that meeting the entry standards and the university transfer standards is a reality for them. So we have a whole new generation of First Nations young people who are finding that their opportunities in the economy are every bit as large as for the rest of us.

There is a glitch. It's something that I have noticed around the student bodies, and the statistics bear it out. About 60 percent of our post-secondary student population is female. That leaves 40 percent male, and one has to wonder: where is that differential of the young men?

It turns out that in a strong economy young men tend to go out and find a job that doesn't require post-secondary education. In a weaker economy they'd go back to school. Having lived in Alberta during the boom and bust years, this was certainly the case there — surging post-secondary populations when the Alberta economy suffered a downdraft because of oil prices. That is exactly what's happening in Alberta today, but we are not seeing that in British Columbia. We are generally very concerned about this issue of the male cohort of the population not seeking education and training at the same level as the female cohort.

This is actually even more strongly stated in the aboriginal population, where about 70 percent of the students in the system are female, leading to a ratio of more than 2 to 1 of female-to-male education. This is something we are going to have to address as a society, and we will do our best in the institutions to make sure that it is addressed.

Now, another initiative that's been quite successful and that we intend to expand upon is open textbooks. We were the first province in the country to launch a government-sponsored open textbook project, and we have 79 open textbooks available for students on line.

This struck me deeply at Northwest Community College — the member for Skeena is here with us today — where I found, lying on the shelf in the bookstore, a book that is about the size of an iPad and about the same thickness. It's called *DC Electric Motors*. Three copies were there. They're available for the students down the hall to buy. But the price tag on the spine of the book, which weighed not more than a cup of water, was \$212.75. This is absurd.

We are looking at ways to work with our institutions

to make sure that more training materials are available, so we can get our students out of the clutches of the academic publishers who have simply found a market that they can milk. We are going to push back on that hard. We are working with our universities and colleges to come up with some common curriculum so that their materials can be used for students throughout British Columbia. They'd develop them internally here in British Columbia. Then, of course, those could be sold or distributed in other jurisdictions to recoup some of the costs.

The goal here, once again, is to make post-secondary education maximally available to our students at a reasonable price. We will not stand by and watch the publishers do what they can to extract cash from our students in an inappropriate way.

We're planning to add 20 more open textbooks to the inventory by September 2015. We're working with Alberta to double the volume of books available, because they can do the same thing. We simply buy an on-line licence that we can use as many times as we want to from a suitable publisher, and then we work with faculty at the various institutions to make sure they're going to have books available that are at a reasonable price to the students.

We're now embarking on an opportunity with UBC for them to start producing their own internal textbooks which could be used throughout the province in fields like anatomy and physiology, where they actually don't change much over the centuries. We have a mature curriculum now, which can be used by all students from a single source.

More particularly, and speaking of anatomy and physiology, we've embarked on a substantial program to remedy the ills of the 1990s in health training. We all know that the members opposite, when they were in government in the '90s, elected to shrink the UBC medical school from 160 places to 120. This proved to have long-term detrimental effects, which we have addressed.

The medical class coming out of UBC now in four distributed sites is up to 288 students. It's proving to be highly successful in having those students retained in the venues where they train. Prince George, Kelowna, Victoria and Vancouver are the sites for the school. It's fully networked, fully integrated, and it works. We are now turning out a cohort of young physicians who are much more likely to stay in those communities and to practise there for the duration of their careers.

[1750]

We've opened up 8,300 new spaces in health and medical programs since 2001. We've doubled the number of midwifery spaces available at UBC to provide for pregnant women, both in their time of pregnancy and delivery. We've added 20 seats and added eight seats for internationally educated midwives, starting in January 2016.

This is actually a remarkably sensible thing when one thinks it through, in that these midwives have trained elsewhere — whether it's in Iran or India or Thailand or in China — and they cannot practise here until they're integrated into our health care system so that they can practise safely. They have the cultural skills. They have the language skills. So they can service communities which have otherwise not had midwifery available to them.

We provide the opportunity for those individuals to integrate with our somewhat complicated and English-speaking health care system in a way that is safe for both mothers and their babies and that provides the midwives with the reassurance that they will be accepted and integrated into our health care system.

We've doubled the number of nursing spaces, funding more than 4,600 new student spaces to train registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, psychiatric nurses, nurses who are re-entering the workforce and nurse practitioners. The Minister of Health is entitled to gloat somewhat in the success of this program in getting more of the nursing cohort out into the workforce.

As I said, we've more than doubled the number of medical school spaces over the last ten years to ensure that physicians of the future are being trained today, given that it can take 13 years to train a physician in a subspecialty.

Now, by 2016 B.C. will have almost ten times the number of residency positions for international medical graduates as we found when we came into office in 2001, when there were only six. In 2013 we had 34 entry-level positions. By 2016 there'll be 58 entry-level positions, making this a viable career track for British Columbians who return from abroad.

We've expanded international education dramatically, with 112,800 international students studying in B.C. That's an increase of 20 percent since 2009. Of course, this provides a route for individuals to pay the full freight of their education to effectively subsidize domestic students, and then many of them decide that perhaps they'd like to live here after all and come in as immigrants with a fully integrated education, fully skilled up and ready to move into society in a productive way.

Of these students, about 38 percent are from China, and a growing cohort is from India. Interestingly, the United States and South Korea are both providing about 6 percent of our international student cohort. They generate \$2.3 billion in revenue. In Australia that number is more like \$16 billion. Australia being a smaller country than Canada, we think that this is an opportunity to grow that field significantly.

Interjection.

Hon. A. Wilkinson: I'm also watching the hour, and I'm noting that the member for Skeena was so entranced

by the description of Northwest Community College that he actually paid attention to the clock as well.

In summary and in the interest of brevity, our goal is to make British Columbians sure that they have the opportunity to be the best that they can be. The throne speech of this week shows that we are on a good track. We can carry on in a steady fashion to deliver the needs of British Columbians through advanced education. Our balanced budget means that we have affordable services and we do not burden our next generation with the debts that we run up. We are simply not doing that.

The overall picture is that we have extraordinary health outcomes, as noted by the Minister of Health today, strong educational performance by any international standard, the lowest income taxes in Canada and a growing economy that is typified by opportunities in fields as diverse as technology, LNG — and, of course, the wonderful news that we're going to go ahead with Site C. So it's no wonder that this throne speech is a

steady-as-she-goes, stay-on-track speech. We are confident in our future, and we will continue to make sure that this is the best place on earth.

Noting the hour, I move that we adjourn debate until the next available sitting.

Hon. A. Wilkinson moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. T. Lake moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Madame Speaker: This House, at its rising, stands adjourned until 10 a.m. Monday morning.

The House adjourned at 5:54 p.m.

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