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3RD SESSION, 37TH PARLIAMENT

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CONTENTS

Monday, October 7, 2002
Morning Sitting

Routine Proceedings

	Page
Private Members' Statements.....	3781
Transportation	
J. Wilson	
Hon. J. Reid	
Volunteers in the community	
H. Long	
Hon. C. Clark	
Tough issues — a compassionate response	
P. Nettleton	
Hon. L. Reid	
The importance of good dental health	
J. Weisbeck	
Hon. S. Hawkins	
Second Reading of Bills	3789
The Hunting and Fishing Heritage Act (Bill M204) (<i>continued</i>)	
P. Bell	
B. Belsey	
R. Hawes	
B. Lekstrom	
H. Long	

MONDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2002

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Good morning, hon. members. Welcome back. I trust everyone had a pleasant summer. The member for Bulkley Valley–Stikine will lead us in prayer.

Prayers.

[1005]

Private Members' Statements

TRANSPORTATION

J. Wilson: A good morning to everyone. It's indeed a pleasure for me to rise this morning in the House and present a private member's statement. What I would like to speak about is the development of our province and the role that our roads and highways have played in bringing us to where we are today.

I would like to step back to the 1850s, when the only industry we had in what we know as B.C. today was the fur trade. Believe it or not, the fur traders were opposed to any development beyond Hope. In 1859 gold was discovered on the Quesnel River. A couple of years later a large discovery was made near what we know as Barkerville today. This precipitated one of the largest gold rushes in our history. People began pouring in from all over the world. They had gold fever. In order to reach the goldfields, these people had to travel over 400 miles in some of the most treacherous terrain imaginable. They set out by water up the Fraser River and then carried on by foot.

The governor of the colony at that time was Sir James Douglas. He had the foresight to recognize the importance of developing the region beyond Hope and recognized the need for the safety of the thousands of people travelling to the goldfields. In 1861, Douglas began construction of a wagon road from Yale up the Fraser River to Barkerville, and it eventually reached Barkerville in 1865. This was a true megaproject considering that all the work was done by hand and with horses and the only high-tech equipment on site was wheelbarrows.

With this road came settlements, and the ranching industry was born. In 1865, Barkerville was the largest centre west of Chicago and north of San Francisco. Barkerville today is one of B.C.'s prized heritage sites.

This wagon road was the beginning of Highway 97. It's our north-south connector, running the full length of the province, and has been our lifeline in the north for many years. The construction of 97 as we know it today was completed for the most part in the early sixties. In the seventies we witnessed another highway boom. The Highways minister at that time was Alex Fraser, and he held the riding that I represent today.

We've come a long way since 1865 because of leaders with vision. We have three east-west connectors; many,

many secondary roads and Highway 97, which still moves the majority of our resources in this province.

During the nineties B.C. experienced some of the best economic times this province has ever seen. Unfortunately, the government of the day did not believe in maintaining and building our highway infrastructure. Instead they doubled the debt, and they wasted billions of dollars, actually.

[1010]

We need safe, dependable highways to travel on. Highway 97 is now 40 years old, and other highways in this province are older than that. They were not constructed to handle the volume of traffic that there is today.

Last week I was driving back to the riding. Going up through the canyon, boredom overcame me, so I started counting trucks. In the 50 kilometres between Spences Bridge and Cache Creek I encountered 67 highway trucks. That's a truck every 28 seconds.

In Quesnel we have a major problem with logging trucks. Upwards of 500 loads a day are added to already congested traffic where Highway 97 goes through the city. With the pine beetle situation, the number of trucks is expected to increase dramatically. A second crossing on the Fraser River would alleviate most of these additional problems, as these trucks are coming in from the west and going to Two Mile Flat.

As a new government we have committed to a balanced budget by the end of the first term, but we also understand the need to provide a solid base for the economy to grow. I feel we are doing extremely well with our highway programs. More money has been spent on maintenance in my riding in the last year than the total for the last ten years under the previous government. As well, construction of a new bridge on the Cottonwood River this fall will be a real improvement to the safety of Highway 97.

Some people have questioned why this project got the go-ahead, as the road is fine. All you have to do is slow down. That's not the first time this conversation has occurred. It happened way back in the twenties when the first vehicles began using the old Cariboo wagon road. The drivers complaining about some of the hairpin corners would find little sympathy from the stagecoach drivers, whose comments would have been: "All you have to do is slow down." There will always be people who question decisions and want to maintain the status quo, but we are moving forward and providing the kind of leadership that this province voted for.

Hon. J. Reid: It's interesting going back over the history of the province and looking at what did bring about the development we have and the opportunities we now enjoy. Certainly, some of the things have never changed. We had treacherous terrain many, many years ago; we still have treacherous terrain.

This summer I had the opportunity of being on the short portion of the original wagon road that was there — built with a lot of sacrifice — to be able to deliver people for the development that the gold rush brought.

It is a remarkable achievement, but we see that with the overgrown trail and what we now have for roads, capacity continues to need to be added as we do grow and develop in this province.

The investments that were made in the 1960s and 1970s in roads were farsighted and were an investment in the province. We've been able to enjoy that capacity, but we have also now been consuming that capacity on those roads. We have the situation, as the member mentioned, that while the number of logging trucks going through Quesnel is a problem, it is also wonderful to see there is still that activity going on in these difficult times.

We want to make sure we're doing our best to provide for that traffic, to have a good flow of goods and services through this province. As the member mentioned, Highway 97 is a major trade route corridor in the province both from past history and certainly because of present conditions.

We are looking at working with the city of Quesnel. I had the pleasure of meeting them at the UBCM to talk about the options and the opportunities that exist there. The Cottonwood Bridge and the work that's going to be done on the Cottonwood Bridge — \$9 million, to be able to make the improved access and the new bridge — are going to be really important, again, to maintain the integrity of that crossing and to make sure that the city of Quesnel is well served.

[1015]

We are looking, though, at other opportunities. As we are having to develop new infrastructure and having the challenge all over the province of new infrastructure, there are opportunities to partner with different levels of government, as was done with the Cottonwood Bridge with the partnering with the federal government, as well as looking at partnering with industry to achieve the goals that we need to achieve.

The city of Quesnel was talking about a new bridge, an improved road alignment, which would mean more efficient transportation of goods and would certainly alleviate some of the problems in the downtown section of Quesnel. We want to pursue that idea; we want to investigate it. We know that a second crossing — another bridge there — would be about \$22 million to \$25 million, and that would certainly redirect a lot of this heavy commercial traffic away from the downtown core. It would also bypass a slide zone that the community has concern about, knowing that it exists and knowing that if there was an emergency, there would be problems with access into that area.

We are proceeding to see whether there is a business case that can be developed, to see whether there are opportunities for public-private partnerships and to continue to work with the local forest companies and derive the very best benefits for all the people of this province and certainly for the people of Quesnel.

J. Wilson: First, let me thank the hon. minister for her comments. It's quite obvious that she has a real in-depth understanding of the needs and the challenges that face us.

I find it fascinating how history tends to repeat itself. We've had leaders with foresight, and then we've had some with hindsight — that's always 20-20 — but as the pendulum moves, so does our province. We can only surmise where we would be today if Mr. Douglas had not been a man of vision and a man of action. The naysayers were wrong as usual. The fur industry is still alive and well in British Columbia.

Now, the interior may have started with the fur industry, but it was mining that really got the ball rolling. Lately, in the last ten years, mining has had some setbacks — yes, we all acknowledge that — but it's still alive, and once again it is going to play a very important role in our future. The forest industry is now the main driver of our economy, and tourism has grown to become a very significant player. These are our resource industries, and they all depend on our highway infrastructure. We as a new government are faced with severe economic conditions. However, to borrow an old cliché, when the going gets tough, the tough get going, and we are already moving down that road.

We are looking, as the minister said, for new innovative ways of doing things through public-private partnerships. It's a great opportunity for industry, for the private sector and for governments to work together to build a stronger British Columbia. The Cariboo gold rush was an exciting time in our history, and now we have another opportunity for a unique, exciting step forward. That's the Winter Olympics. This will bring in tourists by the millions, and they will want to travel this great province. We are extremely fortunate here to have a Premier who understands the importance of our highways in this province and has the determination to keep us going through these hard times. He's already taken the lead in highway safety on the Coast and the Trans-Canada Highway, partnering with the federal government to rebuild and get some improvements done.

The Premier more than anyone understands the importance of our highways and the role they play in the future development of our resource industries. If Sir James Douglas were alive today, he would be proud of the Premier and say: "Good on you. Let the gold rush begin."

[1020]

VOLUNTEERS IN THE COMMUNITY

H. Long: Mr. Speaker, it's a delight to be back in the House in the fall session. I look forward to a great session this fall.

The true value of a volunteer lies in the things you don't see, hear or read about. While the intent of volunteering is not publicly recognized, the value that volunteers add to the social fabric of our communities should never go unnoticed. In the time allotted me today, I would like to give you a glimpse of the contributions made by volunteers in my riding of Powell River-Sunshine Coast, to pay tribute to individuals who are unsung heroes of our communities and to recognize

the strength that lies in their numbers when people come together in a common cause.

The St. Mary's Hospital auxiliary makes up a total of 493 volunteers, which include the Candystrippers. This is the highest membership in British Columbia. As a member of the B.C. Association of Health-Care Auxiliaries, this dedicated group of individuals clocked a total of 60,567 volunteer hours and raised \$267,487 last year alone. I commend them for their efforts. The Powell River Hospital Auxiliary also provides an excellent community service through the work of 228 volunteers. In addition to sponsoring the Candystrippers, the auxiliary also raises funds for hospital equipment, offers school tours and operates a gift shop in the hospital, among other things.

Two more groups I would like to highlight today are the Sunshine Coast Community Services Society and the Powell River Community Services Association, who together keep over a hundred volunteers busy. The two organizations complement one another as they work to sponsor various social, health, educational and housing services for our residents.

Most people have heard of the Meals on Wheels program, which is provided through home support services. But how many people are aware that each delivery is made by a volunteer driver?

Next is a salute to all senior volunteers who keep the seniors centres humming.

This government celebrates and encourages the work of volunteers and compliments the number of programs and services we offer, especially for society's more vulnerable. I believe the greater involvement residents have in the delivery of such invaluable service, the stronger the community will be.

Recognition of volunteers would not be complete without a hats-off to the wonderful contributions of service clubs like the Kiwanis Club, the Lions, the Shriners, the Loyal Order of Moose and the Rotary Club. Furthermore, our riding boasts a total of six Royal Canadian Legions. Another invaluable service provided in the community of Powell River-Sunshine Coast is added safety and peace of mind made possible by Citizens on Patrol and Court Watch.

Along the same lines, local RCMP also are beyond their regular duties through the volunteering and fundraising in Cops for Cancer and Tour for a Friend programs. Proceeds from both these successful events go to pediatric cancer research and Camp Good Times. I'm also very proud of the work done in our riding by more than 330 volunteer firefighters who double their volunteer duties by taking on various charitable fundraising initiatives.

Let's also not forget all the folks who struggle daily with their own illness but nevertheless manage to continue doing their part for the community. A great example of such dedication is Esther Andow, now almost 90 years young and still growing her beautiful flowers, which she sells to raise money for the blind. For more than ten years Esther tirelessly attended her loving task, thus providing many thousands of dollars to the

Lions Club. Despite her failing health, this year she managed to raise \$600 for the blind.

Another champion of this cause is Dr. Geraldine Braak of Powell River. In 1971, Dr. Braak became legally blind, and in 1976 she was instrumental in establishing a Canadian Council of the Blind White Cane Club in Powell River. She became the first president of the club, a position she still holds today. Geraldine was also instrumental in fundraising for the development of a play area on Willingdon Beach, which was designed to take into consideration participation of children with disabilities.

Next is a salute to the folks like Anne Quinn of the Sechelt Indian band who have, over the many years, been busy complementing and documenting the native language of the Sechelt people. Not only have her efforts led to the native language being taught in nursery school to grade 12, with a language credit for older students going on to university, but her work has also ensured that aspects of culture are not lost with the loss of language.

Whether it is one person or the collaboration of a community, the people of my riding have a lot to be proud of, like the tremendous outpouring of support from the residents of Powell River who in 1987, along with the RCMP across the country, formed the Bruce Denniston Bone Marrow Society, which raised over \$2 million for the Canadian Bone Marrow Foundation registry.

[1025]

The community of Powell River also benefits from the lifetime work of a man named Pat Thompson, who now has a street named after him. Pat is, by the way, about 95 years old. The street leads to Powell River General Hospital. Pat served on the hospital board for 37 years. In addition to this, Pat also had an initial involvement in the March of Dimes annual fund, which led to the establishment of United Way in Powell River 20 years ago.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to recognize the hard work and commitment of the parents in our communities who help schools with fundraising, coaching and more, and also the teachers who spend their evenings ensuring that students' extracurricular activities are both safe and enjoyable.

It has been just over a year since guarantees for parent volunteers were put into legislation, and I believe we are beginning to see the benefits. Parents are vital partners in education, and their contribution to a quality education system is priceless. Not only are the children and youth of our riding blessed with dedicated parents and teachers, but as you can see, they also have an abundance of role models in the community who continue to give themselves so freely.

Hon. C. Clark: I have been to Powell River recently, and I can attest personally to the fact that it is a community filled with people who are prepared to contribute to their local citizens, to sacrifice their time, to share their knowledge and to share their sense of community

with their fellow neighbours. It is truly a remarkable community in that respect.

I met Geraldine when I was in Powell River. It was a privilege to meet her. She has been involved in assisting people with disabilities all of her life, and she's made a tremendous mark in doing that. In particular, right now she's working on programs for disabled children in schools. She's full of ideas, creativity and a willingness to share her time and her knowledge with her community. She's a rare individual indeed but not so rare, because Powell River is filled with people who are prepared to make those kinds of sacrifices.

In our education system we are blessed with many, many people who are prepared to volunteer and give of their time in order to make sure that young people's education is improved. When we brought in the legislation last year to guarantee parents the right to volunteer, we did it with the knowledge that there are thousands of parents out there who are prepared to make sure that they will do what they need to do to make sure their children get the education they need. We know that the more parents are involved in their children's education, the better those children do.

There are legions of examples across the province where parents have gone in to read to classes, to build a garden outside a classroom, to share their knowledge of what it is to be a firefighter or a nurse, to bring in bones for people to look at and talk about how the human body is constructed — parents from all different backgrounds, from all different professions who are prepared to share their time and knowledge in the benefit of young people's education — and teachers who are prepared to sacrifice their time, in addition to the time that they get paid for, for being there during school hours, to make sure extracurricular activities go on. My father was one of those people, and I can't count the number of nights that my father wasn't there around the dinner table because he was out coaching basketball or tutoring a kid from his math class who maybe needed a little extra help.

In British Columbia we are blessed with thousands and thousands of teachers who are prepared to make those kinds of sacrifices not because they get paid for it, but because they love kids, and they love imparting knowledge to those children. It's magic to see what happens when a teacher or a parent sits down with a child and imparts knowledge and tells them something they didn't know — maybe gets their mind moving in a direction it had never moved before. That's magic. In British Columbia we are blessed with volunteers across our province who perform that kind of magic every day. Thank you very much.

[1030]

H. Long: I want to thank the minister for her kind words about my community. I think she's entirely right about the volunteers throughout our province.

As we all know, the Queen was here yesterday at the Legislature and also at the hockey game to drop the puck. At that time, I think something got missed for volunteers who were at the Run for the Cure for breast

cancer. It was a huge event in Vancouver. I was there with a friend. A lot of people took part in that. Tens of thousands of people were involved across Canada, but in Vancouver there was a huge turnout. It was absolutely spectacular, and it shows you the kind of people that get involved in volunteering for friends and make it work.

Volunteers are the backbone of our communities. Volunteers unselfishly give of themselves every single day. I think it's important to remember, when we talk about these volunteers, that we're talking about people — each and every one of them that gives their time. I think I've missed a lot of those people in what I did today in my speech about the volunteers, and I want to say that each and every one of those volunteers has to be recognized, from the smallest to the largest. I want to say today that without volunteers, this community, this Canada, this B.C. would not be what they are, and I really say that we take our hats off to our volunteers and that we thank them each and every day.

TOUGH ISSUES — A COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE

P. Nettleton: Tough choices, a compassionate response. Thank you for this opportunity to speak here today. I believe we're about one-third of the way into our current mandate, and I have, as we all have, begun to get a strong sense of our accomplishments and, what's more, the work yet to be done. I will devote my time in this private member's statement to discussing how important I feel it is for us as lawmakers, and as those who have the important task of representing and standing up for ordinary British Columbians, to strive for and to maintain a balance between the tough decisions we have to make and the resulting need for a compassionate response at the same time.

Now, please allow me to explain what I'm getting at here. One-third in, and we can surely agree that we've been through some difficult days together in making many changes — changes to set straight a decade or so of incompetence, of willful neglect and of errors made by past government. When it comes to cutting taxes, getting on the road towards balancing the books, refocusing health care dollars to patients; when it comes to giving school boards more autonomy to deliver quality education to our children as referred to by the previous members, in the course of these important tasks we have before us, I believe it's imperative in addressing the so-called macro-issues like revitalizing the economy, restoring sound fiscal management and those goals and at the same time the so-called micro-issues that those effects of the big picture on the little people, the disabled, the homeless, the addicted, and so on, are considered too — in short, the need to continue with a compassionate response to tough issues at every step of the way and regarding everything we do as elected representatives.

At the ground level — for example, in our constituency offices — we attempt this balancing act virtually every day, often relying on our staff and the limited

resources they have. When it comes to WCB files, for example, and getting longstanding claims resolved, I presently have one fellow with a claim going back 40 years, if you would believe it. That's simply unacceptable.

I have dedicated much time and effort to assisting the Fraser-Fort George Regional Museum, better known as Exploration Place, in their efforts to provide a world-class education and museum experience. In a time when governments, by necessity and by design, no longer just pull the magic tax lever to come up with funding and in a time when families have to make difficult choices about where to spend their disposable income, or at the ground level helping constituents get information on when their medical procedure will be and in the north, of course, helping them get to where that procedure will be, this is a common balancing act.

We also strive for this balance between tough decisions and a compassionate response every day at the riding level, such as with elementary school closures in school district 57, as in many other districts. I attended many meetings with parents such as those from the now-closed Gladstone Elementary School, no doubt all greatly concerned about their children's education and their children's future.

[1035]

In May, I marched with local parent advisory councils to get a better idea of their real concerns. On this note, I'm grateful for the dedicated efforts of the local school board trustees that were faced with making difficult choices. Like us in this House, the school trustees have shared similar experiences with us when it comes to the need to make tough decisions.

Yet another example at the riding level is the effort to maintain access to justice services in the community of Vanderhoof, the geographic centre of British Columbia. The eagerness to work together on this issue both from the Vanderhoof officials and from our own here in Victoria, in particular the Attorney General, has led to a successful resolution with the establishment of a circuit court just last week. These efforts will be much appreciated by the many people in this part of our great province that require access to courts. When I think of this, I am grateful for the open-door access to the members of cabinet when it comes to these difficult riding files.

As a second-termer, I can tell all members of this House that this accessibility we enjoy, this willingness on the part of cabinet to roll up their sleeves and assist all members of the House and this attitude of openness was not the case under the previous government. This is something I wish to clearly make known to everyone.

I should further note that the many, many visits by the members of cabinet to northern communities on a regular basis, taking time out of their busy schedules, are viewed by the people of the north as a welcome and refreshing change. You might say it even comes as a surprise to some, but certainly a pleasant and welcome surprise. This is the kind of representation that is necessary if we are to continue to seek to achieve this

balance of managing to make tough decisions while at the same time being respectful of the just as important need to make these tough decisions in a compassionate manner. When I continue my comments, Mr. Speaker, I would like to provide some examples at the provincial level of where I believe this balance is being achieved.

Hon. L. Reid: I'm pleased to rise today and perhaps give a snapshot in response to my hon. colleague from Prince George-Omineca — a snapshot of the kinds of supports and resources we're putting in place for very young children in British Columbia. It certainly complements the work he is doing in his riding and that my colleagues are doing in their ridings across the province.

Many of you will know what a challenge it is for children with fetal alcohol syndrome. It's an enormous challenge. We are, indeed, expanding the Building Blocks program across the province. We will probably double, this year, the number of programs available. Will that be a support to families? Yes. Will it craft the outcome we all desire, which is healthier, full-term, full-weight infants? Absolutely. That is the goal. When children reach their first school experience, we want them to have the best possible opportunity. How we build that opportunity with families across the province is absolutely the goal.

We have learning sites across British Columbia that bring together networks of excellence, people who are truly committed to crafting great, great learning opportunities for children. Again, when those children enter the school system in Prince George-Omineca, they have opportunities they may otherwise not have had. So it's vitally important. That brings into play all kinds of folks across the spectrum: public health nurses, educators, community folks, families, parents, all the people that collectively share the child as they go forward in terms of crafting the best possible learning environment. Again, it's vitally important.

Infant development programs in British Columbia. Those are the individuals who deal with the most vulnerable babies born in the province — little tiny souls who need supports, who need ongoing support and guidance in terms of the best possible resources and how to acquire them in a variety of communities across the province. There are some little tiny souls who need ongoing speech language therapy, occupational therapy or physiotherapy, whose parents need support in terms of building on the kinds of opportunities that they would wish for those babies. It's vitally important that we continue to enhance those programs and continue to deliver the best possible programs.

[1040]

The children who are a little bit older, which the hon. member acknowledged, can and will be supported by family places and neighbourhood houses across the province, because it is about compassion. It is about families, parents, babies, children, young people feeling welcome. Indeed, it was my pleasure to be in Surrey-Whalley on Friday for the opening of Whalley Family Place.

It's vitally important that we continue to build those resources in communities so that people have a comfort zone. We want people to feel welcome, and we want them to be confident enough to reach out for assistance when they require it. To have community places that are readily accessible only makes good sense. Again, you will see this administration supporting that level of endeavour in terms of supporting families.

Many of you will know that sometimes, as a parent, the best approach is better information. People often have said: "Well, if I knew that, that decision may have been easier." We have joined with the Ministry of Health Planning, my colleague to my right, in terms of producing the *Baby's Best Chance* series, a vitally important document to support families, and not just families who have brand-new babes but individuals who are anticipating becoming pregnant — wondrous prenatal information, nutritional information, how to take folic acid and to do all the things that can contribute to the outcome of a healthy infant.

That document is before us. We are going into production on two more documents. We have *Toddler's First Steps*, and we have *Preschoolers Ready to Learn*. All of those supports will support my hon. colleague in his riding as they go forward to produce the best possible students they can produce.

One of the other areas that we're concentrating heavily on in this mandate is aboriginal early childhood development — vitally important that we do what we can, what is required with community, build capacity with community. This is not about government once again imposing any process on any aboriginal community in British Columbia. This is about working together to build capacity, to build resiliency, to do the things that make sense for community. Will it be a one-size-fits-all proposition across the land? Absolutely not. It will be about individualizing to individual community, tailoring the needs of community to the service that might be available — vitally important that we do that.

Many of you will know that we've worked very closely with Dr. Clyde Hertzman from the University of British Columbia. We will continue to evaluate, and we will go forward from the basis of the best science in terms of making wondrous strategic investment in the area of early childhood development.

P. Nettleton: Thank you, minister, for your kind and appropriate comments. I think we all know what you stand for and the good work you're doing, and we thank you for that.

I appreciate your continuing efforts, not only hon. minister but hon. members, because like all of us, beyond the riding level we also, as members of this House, must keep in mind the balance between tough choices and a compassionate response when it comes to the provincial issues that impact all of us. Here there have been some areas where we've done this with success, and I will mention just a few.

Increases in MSP premiums come to mind since at the same time we've greatly expanded the eligibility for premium assistance and, more so, premium relief completely. The truth-in-budgeting legislation will, as well, go a long way to ensuring that the limited funds we have are spent in an accountable manner. The same can be said for the waste-buster website, open tendering on government contracts, ministry service plans and the hard work of the fiscal review panel, to name a few.

All of these commitments — commitments that were made, that were honoured — will go a long way to ensuring that the funds we have are put where they are needed the most: increased funding for first nations programs, boosting health care spending to more than \$10 billion, pay cuts for all of us here as part of overall reductions in government funding in various ways.

These are what I mean by the need for a compassionate response to the tough decisions we have made and will continue to make. I think this House, this government, should be cognizant of this goal and this aim for balance at all times as we go about our duties throughout this mandate — to recognize, to declare that none of us, none of our families, none of our friends and foes alike, even, remain untouched. Indeed, all of us have felt in some way the effects of necessary changes, and in carrying out the changes that are made we will acknowledge and will recognize whenever possible the hardships created for some by these changes — the ones that might fall through the cracks, so to speak — and then do what is within our power, within our larger vision, within our resources to mitigate and minimize these foreseen yet unavoidable hardships.

[1045]

I don't think this is such a tall order. Keeping the need for this balance in mind, in my view, will not only allow us as a government to turn the province around but to do so in a way that garners us respect and deep but long-lasting support from all British Columbians. This much is something I intended and will continue to do to the best of my abilities.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD DENTAL HEALTH

J. Weisbeck: Good morning, everyone. You know, I sold my dental practice in 1996 after 25 years of practice. I never thought I'd be standing in this House speaking about cavities and gum disease. My statement was prompted by a request for help by a Kelowna dentist, Dr. Ian Leitch. He was representing a number of dentists in Kelowna who were offering their services for free dental service to some of the needy in our community. They recognized the need for access to good dental care.

Before I talk about the solution to this access problem, I'd like to talk about the importance of good dental health — or good oral health, because there is a distinction between the two. There was a brief done for the Commission on the Future of Health Care in Can-

ada, and it was prepared by the Canadian Association of Public Health Dentistry. The quote taken out of this brief was a quote by the Surgeon General on oral health in the United States. He recognizes that oral health and general health should not be interpreted as separate entities.

Oral health is integral to general health, and oral health means more than healthy teeth. You cannot be healthy without oral health, and there's often a disconnect. People almost feel there's a separation between the oral cavity and the rest of the body, and it's absolutely not true. Just to better understand that situation, that connection, the oral cavity is a very, very vascular area. There is a very large number of blood vessels in your oral cavity, and those of you who've had a cut or an abrasion in your mouth know that bleeding can occur very readily.

As a result of this blood supply, our mouths heal very quickly. That's the positive side. On the other side, however, this blood supply can also pick up microorganisms and their products and pass them into the bloodstream. Any decay, abscessed teeth or periodontal disease can spread throughout the rest of your body. The same blood that's nurturing your teeth and gums passes through your heart and the rest of your vital organs, in some cases compromising an already-existing problem. In the case of rheumatic fever, for example, you've had scarring of the tissue in the heart by having bacteremia, bacteria in the bloodstream, and you can cause further damage.

Recent research evidence suggests that oral disorders can have a significant impact on systemic health and the quality of life. They affect the well-being of individuals and society as a whole, and they have a huge impact on our health care system. Talk about dental decay. It's the disease caused by bacterial infection. It's caused when you have a combination of certain bacteria-causing bacteria in your mouth, foods usable by these bacteria and susceptible teeth. When they are in contact long enough, you get bacterial by-products and demineralization of the enamel. Ultimately, obviously, this can spread to the case where you have an abscessed tooth.

It is one of the most common disorders of childhood, affecting 60 percent of five-to-17-year-olds. A more severe case of this, early childhood caries, affects the primary teeth of infants and very, very young children. I've got to tell you that it's a very sad scene when you have a young patient like this coming in. I remember seeing them in my dental practice: a young patient coming in with their completely rotten teeth and the impact that has on that child.

In B.C., ECC is a condition, it is estimated, that affects over 8,000 children, causing pain and infection and adversely affecting their health, behaviour, mental and physical development. In societal terms, ECC treatment draws on much-needed hospital resources, adding to already-long waiting lists. You simply can't treat these young patients in your dental chair. They have to be done under general anaesthetic. In many

cases hospital wait-lists are long. The patients' condition deteriorates, since dental disease is progressive.

Financially, the annual treatment costs to the private and public sectors combined are over \$10 million. Tragically, this condition is preventable. I know we've done a wonderful job in dentistry in preventing dental disease, but there's still a long way to go. There are still parts of our population that are more affected than others.

The effect of this disease results in pain, poor sleep and poor eating habits. It can be a contributing factor in failure to thrive, in which children exhibit low weight and height for their age.

[1050]

Another condition, periodontal disease or gum disease, is a chronic infection caused by bacteria that accumulate in plaque. Gum disease can be the leading cause of tooth loss. I've already spoken about the complications to a compromised heart.

A national study of Canadians, aged 39 to 69, found that those with periodontal disease had between three and seven times the risk of fatal coronary heart disease. Recently, I know that a cardiac surgeon recognized this, and he cancelled a surgery until the patient's condition was improved.

Just as children are very susceptible to dental disease, the elderly are affected by their oral condition. Needs for dental care in the over-65-year-old group are higher, particularly in institutionalized elderly. It's been estimated that between 5 and 10 percent of community-dwelling elderly and 30 to 60 percent of homebound and institutionalized elderly are malnourished.

Poor oral health and tooth loss in the elderly result in the reduction in the ability to chew and in marked changes in dietary preferences. Those with no natural teeth have reduced intakes of fibre, protein, calcium and vitamin C. These reduced intakes are associated with reduced biochemical markers of nutritional status.

Studies of hospital and nursing home populations have indicated that poor oral health and problems chewing are linked to low body mass index and involuntary weight loss. In turn, these have been associated with increased morbidity and mortality.

Among Canadians aged 18 years and over, 13 percent have problems chewing and 10 percent have problems with speech. One-third of those aged 65 and over cannot chew a complete range of foods. For one in seven adults, poor oral health impacts on psychological and social well-being. It detracts from the pleasure of eating and affects communication, social relationships and other daily activities.

We know how important it is for people to be able to find jobs. I know we have a real impetus by our caucus and this government to find jobs for those who haven't worked for years and certainly that....

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. S. Hawkins: I think my colleague the member for Kelowna-Lake Country makes a very compelling statement and some really good arguments for why we

should exercise preventative measures and look after our oral health.

I think there's been a real renewed awareness in prevention and making healthy choices. Certainly, the importance of oral health and its impact on general well-being and overall physical health is underlined by the statements he makes.

I think in the past it was almost inevitable that we experienced tooth decay or loss with aging, for children to have dental decay and for oral cancers — cancers of the mouth — to be a significant threat to all of us. Yet I think that with recent advances in prevention and certainly with management of cavities and gum disease — and I can't think of a better group that promotes prevention than the dental surgeons; I can tell you they're right at the forefront of this — we have seen this reverse in cavities and gum disease.

I think we can all appreciate, as the member points out, that young children with early cavities experience pain, difficulty eating and certainly sleeping with their oral health being incapacitated. Cavities affect the development of secondary teeth, and they also have an impact, as the member said, on a young child's growth and ability to thrive. I understand that there is on average about 11 percent of kindergarten children in the province that have childhood cavities. That seems to be an awfully high number to me. Hopefully again, with good oral health and preventative measures, we can work on addressing that.

Certainly, our public health dental hygienists and assistants in the health authorities offer preventative oral health services throughout the province in order to help reduce this incidence. They work primarily with new parents and young children to help assist in establishing healthy behaviours. I understand that new parents receive critical information like help on feeding practices to avoid nursing-bottle tooth decay in early childhood activities. I think, again, that's very important.

[1055]

In addition, I understand that our dental staff have developed specific strategies to help with those most at risk of dental disease. I know that in the Okanagan, where my colleague and I hail from, dental public health staff screen for risky oral health behaviours at preschool immunizations visits, and then they follow up with families to help reduce the risk of dentally unhealthy behaviour. In Vancouver we have programs that help meet the needs of new immigrants, particularly those of Vietnamese and south Asian background. I know that these culturally sensitive programs help to meet the needs of new immigrants, and they certainly have been very good in improving dentally healthy feeding practice and reducing the incidence of cavities in these young children.

Dental health is important not only when we're young but also when we're old. As more of us are keeping our teeth as we age, which is a good thing, we are seeing concerns around cavities in our aging population as well. In adults, I guess the one thing.... We are

affected by periodontal disease, but more seriously and rarely, we also have to think about oral cancers.

Certainly, the risk of oral cancer can be prevented and reduced by quitting smoking, and our province is recognized as a leader in our efforts to reduce the rate of smoking. We have the best non-smoking rates in Canada, but they're not good enough. We are working hard on tobacco strategies and smoking-cessation strategies.

I think it's important that government continue to work together with partners, with health professionals in our communities, so that we can address the issue of good oral health. We'll continue to do that, and we're certainly going to work with the partners to make sure we facilitate innovation and find effective approaches to keep our population in good oral health, especially in our groups at risk, as the member rightly points out.

J. Weisbeck: I thank the minister for her comments. I spoke earlier about the group of dentists in Kelowna who wanted to improve access to dental care for some of the underprivileged people of our society. There is a Victoria solution.

I would like to recognize that the Cool Aid Society had a report done for them in November of 2001. The report was titled *Towards a Downtown Community Dental Clinic in Victoria*. Some of the concluding remarks were: "A dental clinic will not only significantly address people's immediate need for treatment, but it will also begin the process of integrating oral health into our communities. A clinic will offer more than treatment; it will offer hope."

Well, the clinic is now a reality, and their goal is to provide quality dental care, particularly to those on social assistance and first nations people. They offer reduced rates and payment plans to uninsured patients who otherwise could not afford treatment.

This clinic is funded by the Vancouver Island health authority and a fee for service. A nice part about this, as well, is that like the offer from the dentists in Kelowna, there are a number of local dentists who offer their services free of charge at this clinic on certain days of the week. In September, for example, they had four volunteer days by the local dentists. Here's a great bonus and a way to put back something into their communities.

The cost of dental disorders is huge. It is ranked third in terms of treatment costs after cardiovascular diseases and mental disorders. It has a huge impact on our society. There's some data here from the U.S. It states that in 1989, 2.7 million work days and one million school days were lost because of poor dental health.

I commend, firstly, the Cool Aid Society, and I thank the minister for her comments. Thank you for this opportunity.

Orders of the Day

Mr. Speaker: We move now to adjourned debate on second reading of Bill M204, intituled The Hunting

and Fishing Heritage Act. The debate was adjourned by the member for Prince George North.

Second Reading of Bills

THE HUNTING AND FISHING HERITAGE ACT (continued)

P. Bell: Certainly, the four months since we adjourned debate on this bill have moved very, very quickly. I suppose, quite interestingly, much of the best fishing season and certainly the early part of the hunting season have transpired since we last sat in this House. Certainly, this bill speaks directly to the ability of British Columbians to be assured the right to fish and hunt within the province on an ongoing basis into the future.

[1100]

I'd like to perhaps speak a little bit about some of my experiences with both fishing and hunting, if I may. Certainly for my personal family it's been a tradition, specifically on the fishing side and a little bit on the hunting side. Many of the fondest memories that I have with my children, going back over the years, are those of trips on various lakes over the northern part of the province, whether it be Takla Lake or Tacheeda Lakes or Grizzly Lake or one of the many, many lakes in the area. The look on a young child's face when he reels in that first fish is something that just warms anyone's heart. Certainly, it has been a tremendous family experience for me over the years.

We've received a number of documents from different folks in my riding in support of this bill. It's been quite interesting that this particular private member's bill has come up on the horizon of many different groups. I can say quite honestly that every letter I have received personally from various individuals in my riding has been in support of this bill. I'd like to read one or perhaps two of them into the record. This one came from the B.C. Trappers Association.

"On behalf of the B.C. Trappers Association, please accept my sincere congratulations on your support of hunting in B.C. and in your recognition of the importance and legitimacy of wildlife use as an effective wildlife management and conservation tool.

"The trappers of B.C. fully support your initiative to have British Columbians recognize in law that recreational hunting and fishing" — and I might add that the writer adds that "and trapping" would be their preference — "are valued parts of our provincial heritage and play an important role in the conservation of fish and wildlife in this province.

"We would be very pleased to play an active role in the advancement of a hunting heritage bill and hope to learn of further developments in the near future.

"The B.C. Trappers Association was formed in 1945 and represents the interests of owners of registered trap lines in B.C., some 2,900 in number. We are committed to management based on good science, sustainable harvests that are humane and well-regulated, and communication and cooperation with related industries and groups as well as government. Our trapper members are found in

every riding in B.C., rural and urban, and all will benefit from your proposed bill."

That's from Michael Green, the general manager of the B.C. Trappers Association, to Mr. Bennett, MLA for East Kootenay.

There has been much support, as I indicated. I spoke at the B.C. Trappers Association conference earlier this year. There were about 300 people at the conference. It was quite an amazing group of folks that were out there. Interestingly enough, they came from many different walks of life. They're not the kind of stereotypical individuals that you would expect to be involved in trapping. There were individuals there that were teachers, that were professors, that were lawyers, that were doctors. It's quite a broad group of folks who are involved in that particular industry. I believe that crosses borders into hunting and more specifically fishing.

My view of hunting and fishing is that they're part of the natural process in terms of effectively managing species and populations of fish and wildlife. There are statistics to clearly demonstrate that a well-managed herd or a well-managed fish population can thrive, and hunting can be used as a useful tool to ensure that the weak are culled from certain populations and that the strong survive. I think there is a reasonable argument that suggests hunting can improve the quality of any given population, whether it be fish or wildlife species. I think this substantiates that game and fish are renewable resources and that we should manage and utilize these resources on an ongoing basis.

I'd like to speak briefly, if I can, about my particular failures in the fishing industry and how they've significantly contributed to the economic well-being of this particular province. This summer I decided that I would try fly fishing. I thought that fly fishing would be a relatively inexpensive sport to participate in. Little did I know that that is not the case.

[1105]

I made a trip to my local fishing supply store and indicated that I would be travelling to a lake, that I would like to catch some fish and that I had a fly rod, so all I needed were a few flies. I asked the local store clerk to pick out a few flies, and there was this large assortment of hand-tied flies that ranged from 99 cents to \$2.99. I thought: what can the damage be here, really? Well, when I walked out of the shop, I was short about \$130 and most assured by the clerk that I would come back with a cooler full of fish from my weekend of fishing.

In the process, after purchasing licences and so on for another \$70 or \$80, we loaded up the motor home, putting about \$90 worth of fuel into it. We fuelled up the boat for another \$80 or so, filled up with the assorted beverages one might anticipate taking on an annual fishing trip and various food stuffs and headed out to the lake.

Well, it was most certainly a wonderful weekend. All enjoyed it — beautiful scenery, wonderful weather. Certainly a great time for the entire family was had, and in fact several families, because there were a number of us that went.

I'm sure the weekend represented the better part of a \$500 bill, and I'm pleased to tell you that the fish are safe and well in that particular lake. There was only one that managed to actually cotton on to one of our flies. Upon arriving in our boat, we determined that he should best live his life on an ongoing basis, so we returned him to the waters whence he came.

I hate to say it, but the \$500 did not result in a cooler full of fish. I think, really, that demonstrates the economic benefit to society and to British Columbians — and not just the internal benefit. I know for a fact that many of the folks that come and fish and hunt in our most beautiful British Columbia do so from other jurisdictions, whether it be from the United States, Europe or certainly from throughout Canada. We most certainly appreciate the dollars that they leave behind in our province. They are truly substantial.

You know, I'd like to move on just for a moment, if I may, to really the nature of many fishers and hunters. I believe they're viewed, perhaps incorrectly, by many individuals as being not ones who are concerned about conservation. I believe that it is exactly the opposite.

I attended a review session for Kakwa Provincial Park and spent some time discussing the park with an individual who characterizes himself as an avid hunter. It was quite interesting speaking to this gentleman because he was perhaps the ultimate conservationist, I would say. He truly believed in the importance of hunting in terms of strengthening a herd, but he is very, very careful in terms of what animal he might take from a herd. He spends days or perhaps weeks analyzing the herd before making a decision in terms of which animal to take.

Well, I'm afraid to say that my hunting experiences, typically, have not been so lucky. I'm fortunate just simply to see something, let alone actually have the opportunity to have a shot at it. This particular individual certainly demonstrated to me the willingness of the hunting community to be very supportive of conservationist techniques. I thought that was worthwhile mentioning.

[J. Weisbeck in the chair.]

You know, probably the best fishing experience I've spoken of.... A negative experience is one where I came home empty-handed. I would like to speak briefly, if I may, about a very good fishing experience that I had. That would be on Takla Lake about eight or so years ago now. My family, in-laws and I travelled to Takla Lake and rented a houseboat on the lake for three days. That truly was a fishing experience worth remembering. Those were not the fish that got away. In fact, they were the fish that did fill the cooler.

[1110]

Over a period of three days I think we caught something in the order of — no, much bigger than that, much bigger — 19 fish ranging from about three to about ten pounds. You know, I have to tell you that my son, at the time, would have been seven or eight years old. He still rubs in today the fact that he caught the

most and the biggest fish of all of the folks that were on the boat. I know, for him, that will be a memory that he will carry forward in his life.

I would encourage all members to think about that with their young families. I know there are members in this House that have young families, and I know there are members in this House that will be having young families shortly. I would encourage all those folks to consider fishing as a family experience that they can look back on in the future and truly have enjoyed.

One of the other fishing experiences that I personally enjoy is that of the Nechako River. Having entered this House about a year and a half ago, one finds that the recreational opportunities or times are rather limited. As everyone knows, we all put in significant numbers of hours on the job. I'm fortunate enough to actually live on the Nechako River, and I can say that for all the stresses of the job and all the efforts we put in on the job, it only takes me about ten minutes in my hip waders with a fly rod to completely dismiss all the stresses of this life that we collectively live in this House and certainly just become one with the environment. I would suggest it's probably the most relaxing experience that one can have — simply wandering down to the river and tossing a few flies back and forth.

I hate to report that yet again, I have come up empty-handed fishing in the Nechako River. However, that said, it's been a very enjoyable and relaxing experience for me. I have had the opportunity to see wildlife wandering up and down the river. I've seen several bears across from my property, which tends to make one retreat quite quickly from the river, but it's been certainly interesting.

The advent of the barbless hook and catch and release over the last ten years or so has become significant. Certainly, that's led further to what I referred to earlier as the conservationist movement amongst hunters and fishers. I think that people have moved towards the conservationist thought process. There's really nothing more enjoyable than the good fight of a nice rainbow trout on the end of a fly rod and then, once you've brought the fish in and it's arrived at your feet, to be able to give that fish his life back, send him back into the water and have him be there for someone else to catch another day.

Certainly, over the years I've moved more and more to catch and release to the point now where I would only keep the very odd fish and turn most of them back. Typically, that has not been a problem because I don't catch very many fish.

Finally, I'd like to wrap up with two comments, if I may. The first one is if we look back to the history in this province, and you look back at the first nations movement in this province, hunting and fishing were sources of sustenance and remain so.

I have three different first nations bands in my riding, and I know that at this particular time of the year as we progress through September, October and into early November, it's a critical time for the first nations groups to be out collecting their winter harvest. That,

in fact, is what they do. They harvest different animals from the herds and utilize them for sustenance through the winter.

When you review the treaty talks that we go through, fishing and hunting rights are always high on the list of priorities for first nations in treaties. So I think it's very suitable that this bill comes forward, because really what it does is entrench the right of all British Columbians to fishing and hunting. That's what first nations are doing when they are coming to the treaty table. They are asking for the same right that the member for East Kootenay is suggesting we should enable all British Columbians to have. I think it's most suitable.

[1115]

The last comment I would make is there is a myth that there's a bit of a divide in the urban-rural issue in hunting, and I don't believe that's the case. I can tell you, for one who travels Highway 97 occasionally, that many, many times I've seen trucks, pickups and various vehicles coming from the lower mainland into the interior to pursue various hunting venues, particularly in the fall. I think the notion that hunting is not something that's important to a citizen of the lower mainland or the southern part of Vancouver Island is not accurate. Certainly, there are some who would prefer that hunting doesn't take place, but I think many, many folks in the urban areas of British Columbia do enjoy both hunting and fishing and would like to see them carry forward.

To close, I'd just like to congratulate the member for East Kootenay. I think he's done an excellent job in drafting his bill, M204, and I certainly support the direction of this bill.

B. Belsey: Before I get into the printed words I have here, I would just like to tell my colleague from Prince George North that possibly it's the flies, possibly it's the body of water he's fishing. But if he would like to come to the North Coast, we could certainly solve his problem of no fish for his cooler.

I rise today to speak in support of my colleague's bill, M204, The Hunting and Fishing Heritage Act. The right to hunt and fish is an important part of our heritage. Over history, since the dawn of man, we have been hunters and gatherers, so I find it somewhat ironic that today we have to consider legislation to protect hunting and fishing as we are in this heritage act.

The right to hunt and fish is an important part of rural British Columbia. Among other things, it is an important part of preparing for winter. It provides a way and a means for rural British Columbians to preserve, can and freeze provisions for those long winters that we enjoy. Some might challenge this as unnecessary, pointing out that you can buy fish and meat at your local grocery store, and this is true. However, the cost of fish and meat in those local grocery stores outside metropolitan Vancouver and Victoria comes with a premium. Freight and handling, etc., can add considerably to the cost of fresh fish and meat. Many of the dedicated, hard-working people who live in rural British Columbia must have this right protected.

There are other benefits that this legislation will provide. A clear, protected hunting and fishing heritage act will provide a better understanding of hunters' and fishers' rights when they work with the animal rights activist groups. Both groups working together understanding the rights that each organization has can only benefit the fish and wildlife of this province. Together, these groups can ensure that wildlife preservation continues so our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren will have the same opportunities we enjoy today when we hunt and fish.

[1120]

I would like to read a few letters that have been received supporting this legislation. The first letter is from Michael Green. He's the general manager for the B.C. Trappers Association. I'll read just part of the letter:

"The trappers of B.C. fully support your initiative to have British Columbians recognize in law that recreational hunting and fishing and trapping are valued parts of our provincial heritage and play an important role in the conservation of fish and wildlife in this province.

"We would be very pleased to play an active role in the advancement of a hunting heritage bill and hope to learn of further developments in the near future.

"The B.C. Trappers Association was formed in 1945 and represents the interests of owners and registered traplines in British Columbia — some 2,900 in number. We are committed to management based on good science, sustainable harvests that are humane and well-regulated, and communications and cooperation with related industries and groups as well as government. Our trapper members are found in every riding throughout British Columbia, rural and urban, and we all would benefit from the proposed bill.

"Thank you.

"Michael Green
General Manager
B.C. Trappers Association."

I have a second letter I would like to read. This was sent to the Premier of the province and signed by R. Boswell, president of the B.C. Wildlife Federation.

"I'm pleased to forward a copy of a recent Ontario provincial government news release regarding the Ontario Heritage Hunting and Fishing Act. The B.C. Wildlife Federation has voiced our strong support for this type of legislation, as our previous letter to you has indicated. The attempts to recognize the very issue that Ontario has now recognized were captured in the private member's bill which Mr. Bill Bennett, MLA, put forward in the last session of the Legislature.

"Hunters and anglers of this province contribute close to \$1 billion annually to the economy of British Columbia. Licence fees alone paid directly to the government by this group are in excess of \$15 million, which does not include the \$1.5 million paid directly to the habitat conservation trust fund for fish and wildlife enhancement work throughout the province. Nor does this take into account the additional contribution they make to conservation with the thousands of volunteer hours to provide a better environment for the fish and wildlife of British Columbia.

"Mr. Premier, it would be a small but welcome move on the part of your government to institute legislation that recognizes the heritage of the hunter and the anglers

of British Columbia, considering their direct financial contribution to the overall economy of the province. This contribution should not go unrecognized. Your consideration in this matter would be greatly appreciated by the 35,000 members of the B.C. Wildlife Federation.

"Yours in conservation,
B.C. Wildlife Federation
Mr. R. Boswell
President."

There are many other jurisdictions that support the right to hunt and fish, as I mentioned earlier, like those in Ontario. Another one that came to my attention just the other day was when President Bush signed the right to hunt in Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve in the United States. He has, by enshrining the right to hunt, allowed hunting to continue in over 600,000 acres of land that were set aside in Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve.

First nations understand the importance of hunting and fishing. Virtually every first nation in this province has made it very, very clear that they have the rights to hunt and fish, and they do want them protected.

[1125]

Before closing, let me say that I am not a hunter. I do not hunt. I'm probably not a very good fisherman, but I do fish.

Interjections.

B. Belsey: I got some new bait.

I am a great supporter of those that do hunt and fish. In closing, I want to make it clear that The Hunting and Fishing Heritage Act is important to thousands of people living outside metropolitan Vancouver and Victoria. It is important to the sustainability of fish and wildlife in this province. It is important to first nations. It is important enough that I will be supporting this bill.

R. Hawes: I, too, rise today to support this bill. Like others before me, I would like to thank the member for East Kootenay for bringing this before the House. I think this bill clearly, from the kind of correspondence I have received, is very, very important to a lot of people in my own riding and right across the province.

In looking at what's put forward here, I note that Ontario and Nova Scotia have bills that are almost identical. They have gone through the same kind of argument, and I'm sure they have had the same kind of approaches by ardent fishermen and hunters who feel that it is critically important for them to have the right to engage in their pursuit, just as those that live in British Columbia do.

I, as the others before me, have received a number of e-mails from constituents in my riding. I'd like to just read a couple of those into the record. One of them here says: "As a lifelong resident of British Columbia, an ardent angler and a fair-chase hunter deeply involved as a caring conservationist, I would like it known that I fully support this initiative by Bill Bennett and staunchly believe all British Columbians should

have the right to hunt and fish in accordance with the law."

Similarly, I have another one. This is addressed to the Premier.

"I'd like to express my appreciation to MLA Bill Bennett for bringing forward a move to declare hunting and fishing a heritage activity. I'd like to see legislation similar to Ontario's right-to-hunt-and-fish legislation. Hunting is a much maligned sport and a service as a wildlife tool.

"My grandparents came to Canada when the century was young. They homesteaded in the north Prairies, and the family had to hunt for sustenance to survive. Hunters and fishers have lost ground to self-serving environmentalists — suburbanites that do not understand the issues but insist on forcing their uninformed morals anyway — and aboriginal issues. Now the ministry that we depended on has had its budget slashed so badly that I do not know how they can be effective. We need this kind of protection."

Another one reads: "This is coming from someone who doesn't think much of politicians" — gee, I wonder why — "but I would like to thank you for your efforts in declaring hunting and fishing as our heritage. It takes guts to take on all of the city slickers. All the best to you and your family.... Some politicians like you may change my mind."

The last one I have here is actually from a fellow that was formerly a director of the Fraser Valley regional district. I have worked with him for quite a number of years. His is a very simple message: "If my MLA is not supportive of your bill, I'd like to know so that I can speak with him." Well, Dick, you don't have to speak with me. I am very supportive of this bill.

[1130]

A thread runs through some of these pieces of correspondence, and that's the urban-versus-rural dichotomy that many believe exists in this province. The previous speaker from Prince George North said that he doesn't think there is that kind of a split, but I do believe there is. It's at least a perception that many in the rural parts of this province have that those who live in the urban centres don't care about rural issues, that hunting and fishing are really rural issues and that the urbanites are trying to somehow infringe on people's ability to both hunt and fish. There's a suspicion by many in the rural parts of this province that those who adopt the so-called environmentalist values really are people who don't understand life in rural British Columbia and don't understand the environmental positives that hunting and fishing provide. The truth is — and it has been said in these e-mails — that hunters and fishers are the true conservationists. They're the people who go out in the woods, the creeks and streams in this province, and they understand the value of protecting the environment so that they can continue to engage in their activity.

This summer myself and a number of MLAs from the Fraser Valley had an opportunity to go up the Fraser River by boat with the Minister of Sustainable Resource Management to take a look at the state of gravel deposits in the Fraser River and the Harrison River, at

how badly those are being silted in. It's because some, I believe misguided, environmentalists have created or caused a situation where gravel can no longer be removed from the rivers, falsely believing that this would somehow protect fish and create new spawning grounds. Instead, what's happening is that the rivers are silting in so badly that they're not only not navigable, but side channels of the rivers are silting in so that spawning fish can't get up them. There are reports from many who live along the river near the side channels in the Fraser Valley that fish are dying. The fry trying to return to the river get trapped and can't get out, and they're dying by the thousands.

As we went up the river, though, what we saw was salmon fishermen lined up shoulder to shoulder — hundreds and hundreds of salmon fishermen and sport fishermen all sharing the banks of the Fraser, all catching fish as they were on their migration up to their spawning grounds. This was a record year for fish in this province in the Fraser Valley. There were millions and millions of returning sockeye, many more than the DFO ever predicted. It's very clear that the sport fishery is not depleting fishing stocks. It's also very clear, as the previous speaker from Prince George North mentioned, there is great economy in the sport-fishing industry of this province.

I'm not a hunter. I do enjoy fishing, although it does interfere with my first love. I guess that's golf, when I have some recreation time. I do know, like the member for Prince George North, the kind of money you spend when you want to go fishing. Hunting, on the other hand, is even more expensive. The licensing cost and the flows of funds to the government are substantial. These are people who are true environmentalists, out in our forests and on our streams, I think, looking after what is a natural gift to us. What they're doing is reporting when there are problems. They're the ones who give us the reports of what's really happening.

We took a look at the Fraser River and saw the siltation. We saw the absolute degradation that's being caused by nature in the river and is going completely unheeded by those who are charged with looking after the environment. The disappointment is something that you can't put into words — disappointment for anyone who lives along the river at what's going on there.

[1135]

As we look at this, at what the environmental movement is doing in this.... Certainly, along the Fraser River, where I live, they are the ones who are causing the problem — not the fishers, not the hunters. I think it's time to create an understanding in this province that those who would engage in those activities are actually helping us.

The argument that has come before. I've heard many times from people: "Stop the hunters; stop the fishermen; they're depleting our stocks, etc." This is just false argument and should be discounted.

This bill would create a right for people to hunt and fish, but the key word in the bill is within the law — in accordance with the law. I can't imagine an argument

against this bill, but the satisfaction and the peace of mind this gives, especially to those who live in the rural areas of this province, are tremendous. I think we have a responsibility to ensure that peace of mind and that right are bestowed on those who would engage in these activities.

In past life I've lived in other parts of the province. I lived in the 1970s in Williams Lake for several years. Following that, I lived in the Yukon, actually, where hunting and fishing are a huge industry. I understand the value of hunting to the economy of those areas, particularly in the far north, in both British Columbia and the Yukon. Although this bill clearly doesn't cover the Yukon, it would be similar in the northern parts of British Columbia, where big game outfitters are creating an economy that is very, very buoyant. It's very important to small communities throughout the northern part of the province and, indeed, into the Yukon.

I understand the kind of money that hunters bring into communities when they come from outside, and I know what they spend when they enter a small community. They buy the provisions, and they hire people to guide and to outfit them. These are huge, huge economic drivers in small communities, but those drivers and the ability of people to hunt is in some jeopardy. We have those who would line up and try to stop them from doing so, claiming falsely that this is somehow hurting the environment or that it's morally incorrect.

This is a heritage in this province. Hunting and fishing have been part of our heritage for many, many years, and this bill enshrines that heritage for all time for all of those who would want to hunt and fish. I can't see any argument against this bill. In fact, I think this does a great deal to restore a sense of togetherness between the rural and the urban areas.

If there is that dichotomy and if in some people's minds the perception, at least, exists, I can think of no better way to correct some of that in some people's minds than to see unanimous support for this bill. I certainly would hope that's what would happen here. I know the member for East Kootenay has received literally hundreds of e-mails from around this province and, I think, from around the country congratulating him on bringing this forward. This is a touchstone issue for thousands and thousands of people. Although there are many who neither hunt nor fish and perhaps wouldn't really understand the importance or the relevance, there are thousands who do.

In closing, I just want to mention that by enshrining this as a right.... Certainly, I'm not a lawyer, but I believe we create a situation where those who would illegally impede someone from doing what is legally correct would have a little more difficulty. The law would be clearer that if people are engaging in what is a legal right, it becomes more difficult for anyone to try to stop them from doing what is legally, in law, their right.

In fact, today is a day where there are some who have said they're going to try to stop the legal activities of this government and this Legislature by any means they can. We live in a time when there are those who

would break the law to try to impede the legal workings of government and would disrespect law in order to get their way. I think this kind of activity should be shunned by all those in this province who respect democracy and who respect rights. This bill would, in my view, help speak to that. Support for this bill, to me, is critical. I know it is going to be widely supported here in the House just as it is outside the House by the people of this province.

[1140]

In closing, I would like to thank the member for East Kootenay once again. I know there are many of us here in the House who want to speak to this bill, because it does reflect the views and the desires of our constituents.

B. Lekstrom: It's certainly a great day to be back in the Legislature and begin the fall sitting and to be back with my colleagues and discussing the issues that are important to all British Columbians.

I rise today to support my colleague the MLA for East Kootenay in his presentation of Bill M204, which is The Hunting and Fishing Heritage Act. It's very interesting that I stand here, and certainly as a child growing up in the north, it was part of my history with my family. It's a huge issue for British Columbians, not so much on the issue of what hunters and anglers do, but on our culture and heritage. We talk about first nations and having hunting and fishing as part of their heritage and their right. I believe it's all of our rights in British Columbia and certainly in our country, but I'll focus on British Columbia here today.

The issue of our ability to go out and hunt and fish in our great land, abiding by the laws that are out there — and that is a key factor in this piece of legislation that's presented — is vital not only to the hunter and the angler but to our children. As a boy growing up, I went hunting with my dad and my uncle often. We went out, and we got to enjoy the great outdoors. There's more to hunting than just what many people think, than going out and catching a fish or getting an elk or a moose or a deer or whatever you may be out for. It's about growing bonds with your friends and family, sitting around at night out at the camp having discussed your day. You can go many, many days, and many, many hunters go many years going out into the great outdoors, enjoying their experience and not taking an animal or not taking a fish. They're out there because they love what they're doing.

The issue that we face is one that's near and dear to myself, not because I'm from the north, but because I'm a British Columbian and a Canadian, and I believe that fundamentally we have the right to be able to access our great lands and go out and hunt and fish. It's about learning to survive in a world that's a very different place today than it was when I was a child — and I'm not that old; I don't want to mislead you all. My hair may make you think that, but I'm not.

The quality of time and the quality of life issue that hunting and angling bring to us.... I know that many of you who probably aren't involved in going out to the

outdoors to fish and hunt may take that as somewhat of a strange statement, but I can tell you that it builds relationships within your family. I can tell you there's no greater time than sitting around out at a camp, out in the middle of the bush somewhere with your friends, your father or your brother and, again, talking about the day and what happened, what you accomplished, what you've seen. I can tell you that it's overwhelming to sit around that campfire and talk about that, and it leads to many other issues as well.

The issue that we face here today is interesting, and I would like to read an e-mail I received that was sent to the Premier from one of my constituents but copied to me. If I could, I'll just read it and then comment on this e-mail that was sent. It said:

"Dear Sir:

"I would like to commend Mr. Bennett for his private member's bill for protecting the rights of anglers and hunters in British Columbia, although to me, it is a shame that such a thing needs to be put on paper to be recognized, even though it has been part of our history since the beginning and continues strongly now. Nowadays, it seems that unless it is on paper, sometimes it doesn't exist.

"I hope that you will support Mr. Bennett's bill, as thousands of anglers and hunters from a large part of your constituency in British Columbia and visitors that come from far away with their dollars in hand will be here watching with extreme interest the outcome of this bill."

That was from Mr. Lloyd, who was a director of the B.C. Wildlife Federation — a friend of mine and a man I know well. He's come to speak to me many times on the issue of what it means to himself, to his family and also to all of the residents I represent, not all of whom are avid hunters and fishermen. You know what they do? They understand the beauty of the outdoors, and they understand what the needs are and what this means to people who actually do go out and enjoy the great outdoors.

[1145]

There are many, I think, misconceptions from people out there about our hunters and fishers when they go out into the wilderness and achieve what they're after. I think that they think these people aren't great environmental stewards. These people are friends of mine; they're family of mine. I've gone out myself on many, many occasions.

I can tell you that probably some of the greatest environmental stewards of the land that I know of are both hunters and fishers. They know what it means to go out and look after our province. They look after the great outdoors because of their love for it — not because of their need for it but because of their love for it. That makes all the difference in the world.

These are people who, when they think of better ways to look after our land and look at conservation issues, get involved. A good example is the habitat conservation trust fund, which is funded through the attachment of fees to our licences by the hunters, fishers, trappers and guiders. These are opportunities, when they contribute to this fund, to go out and de-

velop and work with the needs within our environment. They go out, and they take on many, many projects not just in my local community but right around this province.

As an MLA from the north, I speak on behalf of my constituents, but I speak on behalf of all British Columbians. As was mentioned by one of the earlier speakers, in the territory that I represent, Peace River South, many, many people come from around our province, around our country and around our continent to enjoy the hunting activities that can be enjoyed in my area.

With that comes the economic value as well. It is important, but it's not the most important part of why I'm speaking to this bill. It's an added benefit from my perception on that. The economic value that comes to our sporting shops in the cities I represent and that comes to the guides and the outfitters out there who make a living at this and the benefit for all of our economies in our communities, particularly in rural British Columbia, is vitally important. This is one more piece in diversifying our economies, one that has been around since the beginning of time.

I will stand here and tell you that I will support this bill wholeheartedly and do what I can to make sure to bring an understanding — not debate with the people that disagree, but bring an understanding — of what our hunting and fishing are really all about in British Columbia.

These people are leaders in conservation issues. As with many things we deal with, we'll hear one bad story. There are bad stories in everything we do, and if we want to focus on a negative issue, I'm sure we can make that negative issue front and centre.

I'm here today to focus on the positive issues of what it means, as I indicated earlier, to our friends and family to get out and enjoy the beauty of our province and enjoy the camaraderie — whether it be with their father, brother, family member or friend — and what it's about to get out and really experience what it takes to survive. We sometimes forget that.

There's a whole culture out there that people enjoy. It's not my duty as the elected MLA to dictate to somebody that I disagree. I don't enjoy that, so I don't expect you should. I think it's my job to create a province that everybody loves, wants to live in, wants to raise their family in, wants to do business in and wants to enjoy.

All of us work hard, whether you're an MLA, a small business owner or an individual working for a small business out there in British Columbia. We work to make a living to raise our families. We work so that we can enjoy our free time. Many, many thousands of British Columbians enjoy their free time by heading out into the great outdoors of British Columbia and enjoying the activities of hunting and fishing.

A couple of things I've touched on today are very important, and we go back. I've gone out many times hunting. I'm not the greatest hunter. Many of my friends are much better at it than I am, but I can't stress enough the feeling you get when you're out there, the quietness of the forest at night when you're around.

Many times you sit there. You're somewhat scared if you're sitting up on a bluff. You're waiting and waiting, and a bear walks out. We talk about bears quite a bit in this. There's nothing more beautiful than watching a grizzly bear walk out, although as scared as you are, and take its stroll through the meadow. Depending on what you're doing, whether you're out there dealing with an elk hunt or moose hunt, it's incredible.

[1150]

People will argue that the numbers are dwindling as far as our wildlife. This is not a factual statement. In fact, look at what I've touched upon, whether it be the habitat conservation trust fund and the work that our hunters and fishers do or our guides and our outfitters. These are the people that really are out there taking the data in. They see it on a day-to-day basis, and they understand the needs. These people are out there, and if they aren't working at the conservation issues, their livelihood is at stake. They are the ones that truly understand the needs of our wildlife and what it takes, and they pass the valuable information that they gather on to the people who need it in order to put the regulations together, in order to make the laws so that our land is governed in an appropriate way.

I heard just moments ago the talk of a possible rural-urban split. I'm here to tell you today that the people I deal with in my constituency, wherever they come from — whether it be from the lower mainland, whether it be from the interior of our province when they come up.... That is not on their mind right now. What is on their mind is enjoying our province and enjoying the camaraderie that comes.

Many people have been out with their friends and family for the first time. They come back, and you hear the tales of what they've experienced out there. As I indicated earlier, many, many come back without an animal, and I can't stress enough that it isn't the fact that you go out and you have to get an animal; it's the fact that you go out and you have to enjoy the great outdoors.

I want to go back just briefly and talk on the issue of our heritage and what this means. This is really about a way of life. This is about the ability for many people.... I talk about these many people because they're friends of mine. Many of them I've grown up with all my life, and they actually make their living off guiding, off trapping, and so on, and I learn a great deal. As a person that's grown up in the north, many times people talk to you like you know all the aspects of hunting and fishing and trapping and guiding. I can tell you that you don't. You learn every day from your colleagues. I learn every day from my friends that are involved in the industry.

The more I talk to them, the greater understanding I have of their understanding of nature and what it takes to grow our province. They understand that they're up against many obstacles, many of which are non-factual, I would say. It's not because people are malicious. You know, I'm being very optimistic here. I think they've taken the wrong information, maybe misunderstood it and not followed through on what

really has to be done. I can tell you that the people I know, the people that work in the industry, are true in their hearts to looking after our environment.

I've dealt with many environmentalists, people that are out there to make sure we look after our land — good people. I think I've said in this House before that we're all environmentalists at heart. We know we have but one land to look after. That land is what keeps us alive, and we're going to do that. I think what each and every one of us has to be afraid of in this day and age is the extreme element of the environmental movement — or any other movement, for that matter. The extremists are the ones that I think can derail many, many good initiatives.

I don't mind discussing the issue — and in this case it's hunting and fishing and Bill M204 — with my colleagues, with my friends. Some of them don't agree, but they're respectful in their debate. They bring to the table a respect and an understanding that their view is presented, as well as the opposing view, and at the end of the day, people leave with an understanding of each other's needs. That's really what democracy is all about, and that's what we're here to represent on behalf of British Columbians. It's the right for people to have differing views but at the end of the day have an understanding of what's right and what's proper and what regulations and laws will work so that we can enjoy our lives here in British Columbia.

In closing, I just want to again state my thanks to my colleague the MLA for East Kootenay for bringing this bill forward and presenting it not just on behalf his constituents but on behalf of my constituents and all constituents of British Columbia. I think it's a very, very valuable piece of legislation. I encourage all my colleagues to discuss this, understand it and support it.

With that, noting that my time is coming near a close, I'm going to thank you for the opportunity to speak on this bill and again issue my undying support for Bill M204.

[1155]

H. Long: I rise today to speak to Bill M204 and to support the member for East Kootenay. I'm going to have to be brief.

I don't want to get into talking about the economic value of hunting and fishing in this province, because we all know it's vast. But I do believe, being a flyer and flying the province of British Columbia, just how vast this province really, really is. It's absolutely unbelievable. In my riding alone, I have to fly over wilderness for two and a half hours to get from one end of my riding to the other, and it is well endowed with game of all types and descriptions.

B. Bennett: That's in a Beaver, though.

H. Long: That's correct — in a Beaver.

I think the biggest reason.... I'm going to go back a little bit to support the right of hunting and fishing with this bill. It goes back to my family, where my mother's family and my father's family lived in British

Columbia, here in Powell River, for over 80 years. At that time they harvested many animals for their consumption, and it was an unwritten right. It was a right they had, and they took it for granted. They took it for granted because it was their right to hunt, to fish and to feed their families.

It's time that we put this into a written law, something that people can count on in the future, because sometimes it's very precarious that some people want to take away the rights that people have had for the last 80 or 90 years. I think that hunters and fishers should have that right in the future.

When we get down to the sportsmen and the funding and the men and women that hunt — there are as many women in the sports field now as there are men — you will find that the moneys they provide through their licensing and so on actually do provide the sustainable resource that we have today throughout the province. The abundance of game is actually climbing in many areas of the province. Plantations of elk in different areas, and so on, have even expanded the game. There is a sustainable resource out there. There is game that we can all use and take part in, and I believe that to be the right of every British Columbian if they so wish to take part.

I know that the rod and guns and the people who are real conservationists that provide the money for this are in tune with what's going on. They're the ones that are sustainable in looking after stream reclamation, into salmon enhancement and into game expansion. They provide the funds, and the people of British Columbia should really thank them for doing this. They've been doing it now for probably 80 years here in British Columbia.

Noting the time, I'm going to finalize my speech today in support of Bill M204 — that the hunters and fishers who provide much of the needed funding to protect the resources, to keep the balance between our communities and our wild resources.... I do believe that in the future, Mr. Speaker, you will find that when they pass this bill — I hope that it passes, and I hope that people have the right to continue to hunt and fish within this country of ours, within British Columbia and throughout Canada; I think that right should be expanded throughout Canada as well — these people have the right to harvest their food, be it fish or game, and to continue on with what I would call an organic food source, if we so wish. They're not fed any kinds of steroids or anything in the wild. I think we should have the right to an organic food source as well.

H. Long moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Collins moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

The House adjourned at 11:59 a.m.