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LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR
His Honour the Honourable Steven L. Point, OBC

THIRD SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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CONTENTS

Monday, November 19, 2007
Morning Sitting

Routine Proceedings

	Page
Private Members' Statements	9241
A therapeutic community for north central B.C.	
L. Mayencourt	
J. Kwan	
Poverty	
J. Brar	
L. Mayencourt	
Cycling in Nanaimo	
R. Cantelon	
D. Cubberley	
Safe transportation	
G. Coons	
D. MacKay	
Motions on Notice.....	9250
150th anniversary of B.C. and Spirit Squares program (Motion 69)	
I. Black	
L. Krog	
J. McIntyre	
M. Karagianis	
M. Polak	
N. Macdonald	
D. MacKay	

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2007

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements

A THERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY FOR NORTH CENTRAL B.C.

L. Mayencourt: The notion of creating a therapeutic community for addicts in recovery is not new. In fact, over the past several years many community people have come to me and asked for my assistance in helping them to create one. It always came down to a question of money, and over and over again we found that we just couldn't do it the way that people had planned it. But I've taken it upon myself to create one in B.C., one that is something I can do for a modest sum of money.

The seeds of the mission were sown from my experience as an MLA over the past six years and also from my interest in people living on the margins of society, people that are vulnerable. It's why I created Friends for Life, which helps 2,500 people living with AIDS and cancer in Vancouver today who were previously not getting the kind of support they needed in order to survive.

In the summer of 2004 I spent a few days living in the downtown east side. It's not in my riding, but I wanted to understand the living conditions of people living with homelessness — mentally ill and addicted — on Hastings Street on a daily basis. It wasn't enough just to talk to community leaders. I wanted to see for myself how everything worked and the plight of people living on our streets.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

That knowledge sparked willingness for change within our government, and many new and innovative programs were born out of the experience. Most importantly, I learned about the obstacles people face on a regular basis, obstacles that government and well-meaning charitable organizations have unwittingly placed in front of those they intend to serve.

As a result, changes have happened. Many agencies, including those in government, have modified their policies and procedures in order to improve the experience of the vulnerable people they serve.

[1005]

On one night, I slept under a trailer in Crab Park in the downtown east side. I met a first nations man there by the name of Larry who had been on the street for over ten years and who told me that he was quite determined never to live inside again. The product of a residential school, Larry suffered from claustrophobia,

and even a few hours in a shelter seemed to be more than he could bear.

There were three others there. They also preferred the outdoors because they felt safest there. In the shelter of the trailer they could surround themselves with cardboard, which served a dual purpose: protecting them both from the elements and from the people that prey upon the weak and disenfranchised.

Over the six nights that I slept in the downtown east side, I met several people with similar experiences. I would not have understood the fear that people express over the shelter system if I had not stayed in one myself. While we provide shelters in Vancouver, I had never spent the night in one, so I spent a rainy evening in one. It's a large room with several bunk beds and with over 40 people living there.

Somewhere in the middle of the night it occurred to me how vulnerable I was and everyone else was in that shelter. You're sitting in a room where there are no barriers, and there are a lot of people that are living very desperate lives. I knew and I heard from stories that young people had been sexually assaulted in shelters. Others woke up to find their belongings gone, and sometimes people had their noses bloodied, for whatever reason.

Hon. Speaker, connected people are successful people. It's true with money and jobs, but it's also true with the quality of life. Each of us has a circle of support around us. It starts with our families — your mother, your father, the family friends and what have you. Then you have a circle of friends — people that you've chosen to be part of your family. Then you have co-workers, and then, of course, you have the general community. That is a support system that we sort of take for granted, but it's actually something that's very important to people.

What I found with people that were living on the street with mental illness and addictions is that they do not have those circles of support. Sometimes their families have abandoned them because they were embarrassed by them or because they stole from them or because they lied to them. Friends similarly moved away because they had also found their friendships being abused. Acquaintances and co-workers do as well.

By living with people like Larry, I came to understand that they don't have very much, and what little they have can quickly be lost to someone they make friends with, who might be another desperate soul. The very people that need the support of society are often the least likely to ask for help.

Following my experience on the street, the Premier started the Premier's Task Force on Homelessness, Mental Illness and Addictions. We started an outreach program to connect people like Larry with social services. We worked through the day to fulfil the needs of people on the streets, and it was coordinated and pulled together so quickly that many of the people helped said that their heads were left spinning. It was so effective that the program, which started in my neighbourhood, has now been expanded to other communities and has helped 1,600 people find homes.

When I was first elected, Dave Mowat, CEO of Vancity Credit Union, told me about San Patrignano. He encouraged me to see if we could start one in B.C. The idea percolated in my head. I met with groups wanting to create this kind of community, but it never seemed to get to any more than a nice idea.

Then I went to San Patrignano in central Italy, and everything changed. I was there in January of '06, and I knew we finally had something that we could offer to the poor, the homeless, the addicted, the mentally ill, the beaten-up and the downtrodden. In short, I knew that we could offer hope to what we often call the hopeless.

In B.C. there's an 85-percent relapse rate for the 28-day detox programs. That is a paltry 15 percent of substance abusers in B.C. that are able to beat their addictions. Many users go through our program many, many times. By comparison, 72 percent of the graduates from San Patrignano remain drug-free three years after completing their treatment.

Instead of being an entrée into healing, our 28-day treatment program becomes a repetitive string of failures — failed attempts at beating addiction — and the hope of rehabilitation is quickly and often irrevocably shattered. In Italy I learned that the San Patrignano miracle is real and that we can bring this kind of model here to meet the needs of people in British Columbia. We need to give people the opportunity and the motivation to stay clean permanently.

[1010]

San Patrignano is home to 2,200 recovering drug addicts, some of them living with co-occurring disorders. They live in the community for three to five years. In addition to dealing with their addiction issues, they learn about other things — like vocational skills, how to work, how to be part of a family, how to build a support network around them.

It's a very healthy and loving place. It was founded 30 years ago by a gentleman, a wealthy farm owner. I'll tell you more about it in my next remarks.

J. Kwan: There are many programs that make use of the therapeutic aspects of work and a sense of belonging stemming from inclusion in a community. For example, there are 33 clubhouses for people with serious and persistent mental illnesses in B.C., like Coast Foundation in Vancouver and Pathways in Richmond.

There are roughly 3,000 psychosocial clubhouses throughout the world, mostly in the United States. All of these programs use work as a therapeutic activity to promote a sense of belonging, meaningfulness and expectation.

There is a program on the Island that is very close to a therapeutic community, which is called Providence Farm. It is a therapeutic community that provides programs for people who are encountering barriers to education and employment. I don't believe that the main focus of its programs is for people living with addictions, but it is a therapeutic community. They operate a farm with the idea that work is an important component of healing. Their programs include horticultural therapy and vocational training.

The Sisters of St. Ann own the beautiful 400-acre property that lies at the base of Mount Tzouhalem in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island. Since 1979, the Vancouver Island Providence Community Association has leased the farm and developed innovative programs for the community. There are 14 full-time and part-time staff and over 120 participants each week.

A single guiding principle for their work is that caring for the land together is by nature healing and therapeutic. However, these programs are distinct from addiction therapeutic communities in that all aspects of the programming are based on making people feel welcome and are premised on voluntary participation.

Many of the addiction therapeutic communities use implicit and explicit coercion to try to force compliance with their goals of abstinence and work. Many of the participants work and provide all their wages to the community. As with all such systems based on authority and obedience, there are excesses at times. They make use of public shaming, humiliation and informal as well as formal sanctions against these members.

Therapeutic communities began in Europe but now operate throughout the world and are particularly popular in the U.S. The largest therapeutic community in the United States is Phoenix House, with about 6,000 people in treatment and over 80 programs in eight states.

Therapeutic communities are very structured, and they have been criticized for being too critical and pessimistic. There are some attempts by government in the U.S. to make the therapeutic community movement more compassionate, but as a rule, they do not espouse this approach.

I'm not aware of any peer-reviewed, published study on the San Patrignano community. The study that is often referenced — and it has been by the member — by promoters of San Patrignano as a silver bullet is an examination of the program completed by two professors from the University of Urbino and the University of Pavia respectively.

Their study reviewed people that had been enrolled in the program for no less than three years. Of this subset of people that had been in the program successfully for over three years, they discovered that 72 percent were drug-free. The study appears to have studied only those who had been successful and represents a restricted range of research participants.

Essentially, what the research appears to have concluded is that of those who were successful in the program for over three years, nearly three-quarters were drug-free. Another way to put this would be to say that after removing all the people who had failed to be drug-free in the San Patrignano program after three years of enrolment, they found that there was a 72-percent success rate.

Imagine a diet program that advertised as follows: "Of those who have been successful in losing weight for over three years with our program, 72 percent of them were able to sustain their weight loss." This is not a standard measure of program effectiveness or treatment efficacy. One cannot help but wonder what the actual

success rate of the program would be if all of the participants, including those that were unsuccessful, had also been examined.

[1015]

There is no single tree that grows to heaven when it comes to addiction. We need many trees as part of the comprehensive approach to addiction. For some people, a therapeutic community may be what they need. For others, we need to make sure that there's a vigorous evaluation process in place and that published research is held to the highest standards of peer review.

Like all programs, therapeutic communities may work, but not all. Let's just remember that we need to ensure that there is evaluation of any new initiative regarding this.

L. Mayencourt: I'm appreciative that the member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant has taken some time to read about San Patrignano. I know that she's been associated with several groups in the past in the downtown east side that have also pursued this kind of dream. Unfortunately, those haven't worked out yet, but perhaps we will have that opportunity.

As I mentioned, I spent a lot of time at San Patrignano. I came away convinced that we needed one in B.C. I went on the road, and I talked in 25 communities about it.

In one of the meetings that I was at, I found a couple who introduced me to their own piece of property, an old army base called Baldy Hughes, which is 35 kilometres out of Prince George. On that site, they have wonderful dormitories, a gymnasium, a bowling alley, a curling rink, an ice rink and all that sort of stuff. It's a really great spot. That's where the therapeutic community that I'm creating is going to start.

I'm really excited about it. I want to confirm for the member, because she raises a very good point, that we want to see research from independent sources on these kinds of projects, and I know that we will do that. We're going to work in a partnership with the University of Northern British Columbia and the College of New Caledonia in Prince George to ensure that this model is completely evaluated in a fair and unbiased manner. I'm really excited about the opportunity for doing this.

As the member says, it's not for everyone. Therapeutic communities are not for everyone; neither is harm reduction for everyone. I'm very glad to be able to be part of this project. I hope that members on both sides of the House will avail themselves of the literature that is available.

For the member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant: there's actually a report that was done on San Patrignano by the University of Toronto. It is available on the Internet, and it confirms the findings of the group in Italy. It's a very important piece of information that is there.

I look forward to starting our project. I think there are a lot of people in British Columbia who are desperate for a different approach to drug addictions. Many of us see the revolving door that the 28-day programs create.

Many of us are discouraged and upset and have decided that it has to be a much more holistic approach, where people are not only treated for their addictions

but also have the opportunity to learn and grow to be family and community members, to be able to give, to produce products and to support themselves.

That's really what therapeutic communities are about. They are not about humiliation or about separating people. They are about loving people. I do want the member to make every effort to come and join us at New Hope — which is, as I said, up in Prince George — once we've opened. I hope that she'll take a chance and see exactly what we're trying to create, see the kind of people that are there and see the way that we develop our programs.

I really look forward to the day when British Columbia has another way of treating addictions. That's not to say that the 28-day program or harm reduction is bad but simply that they are not the answer to every person's needs, whereas I think that therapeutic communities add to our offerings.

POVERTY

J. Brar: I rise to make a statement regarding a very important public policy issue — the issue of growing poverty in the province. As we know, Madam Speaker, poverty has been growing in every community in the province since the Liberal government took over in the year 2001. This government has attacked the social safety net in British Columbia by making public policy changes to attack the most vulnerable people and by not having the vision and the commitment to address the issue of growing poverty in British Columbia.

[1020]

Growing poverty in B.C. is a clear indication that this government does not care about the poor and the most vulnerable people of the province, and that is a shame.

In a province as rich as B.C., we have the worst child poverty rates in Canada, and that's a shame. It's a shameful title that B.C. has now held in each of the last four years. In 2004, the B.C. child poverty rate was 23.5 percent. In other words, nearly one in every four kids lived under poverty at that time.

Every month over 24,000 children in B.C. use a food bank, and that is also a shame. What these numbers tell us is that for a quarter of our kids, B.C. is definitely not the best place on earth to grow up in.

The estimated number of poor children in B.C. in 2004 was 196,000 children. Imagine, Madam Speaker: 196,000 children. That is almost the same as the entire population of Burnaby. Think about it: the whole city of Burnaby having kids, and they are all living under poverty — or the entire population of Nanaimo, Kelowna and Williams Lake combined. That's the situation we have when we talk about child poverty in the province.

B.C. has almost the worst income gap between the rich and the poor among the provinces. The poor earn only 6 percent of what the rich earn in this province. That's the gap we are talking about.

The number of homeless people in the GVRD and many other communities in the province has doubled during the past few years. The GVRD homeless count

is up from 1,121 homeless people to 2,174 in just three or four years, and that's growing. This count, shockingly, includes 40 families with children in Vancouver.

Other communities — such as Kelowna, Kamloops, Prince George, Victoria, Nanaimo and Surrey — are also faced with a homeless situation as never before. At this point in time an estimated 70 percent of all B.C. family units were living below Statistics Canada's low-income cutoff after income taxes. That is 97,000 families plus 217,000 unattached persons in B.C.

We also know there are over 100,000 people in B.C. who are working on just \$8 or less per hour, and that's a shame. That minimum wage has not gone up for the last almost six years now. The working poor in British Columbia are paying their taxes and contributing to our economy, yet they are not sharing in the province's prosperity.

The very important questions we need to ask are these. At a time when B.C. has a record surplus, why is the number of children and families living in poverty and the number of homeless people growing in B.C.? The question we need to ask: why, with a record surplus, does this B.C. Liberal government fail to address the growing problem of poverty? The question we need to ask: why is everyone in B.C. not benefiting from the economy?

A successful economy is one which is successful at reducing poverty rates. The record surplus and 2010 Olympic Games challenge our political will to develop a practical poverty reduction strategy to demonstrate to the rest of the world that in B.C. everyone matters.

I have submitted a motion in this House which reads like this: "Be it resolved that this House call on the B.C. government to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the issue of growing poverty in the province of British Columbia."

[1025]

I would like to conclude by saying that the people of B.C. expect much, much better from the B.C. Liberal government — to show some leadership, to show some commitment, to develop a comprehensive strategy to address the issue of growing poverty in British Columbia.

L. Mayencourt: Thanks to the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge for his comments. I think that what he brings home is that there are people in this province who live in poverty, and that's no secret to any of us here in this chamber.

I think that in every community, in every constituency, we have families that struggle. We have single moms that are having problems. We have people that are homeless. There is a great desire on the part of all members of this House to see those problems dealt with.

That's one of the reasons why the Premier put together the Task Force on Homelessness, Mental Illness and Addictions. It's about going out there and finding out what we can do better to ensure that people who are in need are not falling through the cracks and are not barred from accessing these services.

In the 1990s about one in ten British Columbians was on welfare. Today that figure is much, much

lower, and I think that is a very strong indication that government policy has actually been working very well. You see, Madam Speaker, we believe that the best way out of poverty is a good-paying job, so what we've been doing is focusing our efforts on making sure that individuals who need skills get those skills so that they can have a job and can have the opportunity to feed their families, to pay their rent and so on.

In the last six years that I've been here, the welfare rates for every single category — and there are about 35 different categories that happen when you combine kids and families and moms and dads and all that sort of thing — have gone up since our government has come into power. The last time there was a significant increase in the welfare rates was in the very early 1990s when Mike Harcourt was the Premier.

In the time that some of these members were in this House, there wasn't an increase. I think that what we can show here — and I'm happy to share this with the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge — is that income assistance rates have changed and gone up for every category.

The second thing is that community groups are now coming together and supporting what government is trying to accomplish. People like business associations are recognizing that there's more to their business than just making dollars, that there's also a quality of life that they want to see in the neighbourhoods they reside in so that people get the opportunity to succeed.

Unfortunately, poverty tends to run in families. It tends to be something that is generational, and what we have to do is try and find a way of breaking that cycle. By focusing on helping people develop the skills that they need, we can ensure that they can improve their opportunity to access jobs and better incomes.

I think the member said that there are literally a hundred thousand people that are living on \$8 an hour. That's simply not true. The training wage is something that is in place for the first 60 days or so of a person's employment, and then they move to the minimum wage. It is very important that people do not overexaggerate those numbers.

Similarly, the number of people that live in poverty is not as high as what the member has stated. He said that — what was it? — 70 percent or something of the population are below the low-income cutoff for all of Canada, and that's simply not true.

We're moving forward. We're trying to give people the tools they need to be able to get jobs. We're trying to support them with rent supplements, with SAFER grants, with affordable housing in neighbourhoods. We're trying to provide them with supports for the Medical Services Plan.

We're trying to do a whole bunch of things so that individuals in British Columbia, by and large, are getting an improved quality of life, are getting better medical care, are getting better housing, are getting better shelter rates. They are, in fact, actually even living longer as a result of those efforts.

We actually see eye to eye on a lot of these issues. We, the member for Surrey-Panorama Ridge and myself,

are both here because we want to help our neighbourhood. We want to make sure that our people are well looked after.

This is a bipartisan issue. I think we have to work together to see what we can do. I would love to have the member help us on some of our homeless outreach stuff, particularly in Surrey. I know that we can work together and make a better life for people all across British Columbia because we are committed to making sure that those individuals who need our help get it when they need it, where they need it.

[1030]

J. Brar: Thanks to the member for the interesting comments.

To move on these issues, I think the first thing that this government needs to do is to come out from the last century to this new century and start talking about the challenges we face in this century.

The member said that things are fine and challenges my stats. My stats are not my own. These are prepared stats by the government of Canada. If you want to work together, we are happy to work together.

The first thing that this government has to do to move forward is to eliminate the \$6 training wage.

The second thing that this government has to do is introduce a minimum wage of \$10, because those are the only people who did not get any raise during the last six years. The Premier of this province got 54 percent himself. It has been six years that these people have not had any raise, when the inflation rate in B.C. has almost doubled and in many situations tripled.

The third thing is that this government needs to commit to going beyond the task force and taking real actions and start building affordable housing in this province that this government stopped about six years ago.

This government introduced many public policy components. I would like to mention a few that have caused homelessness in this province. The first one is that they introduced a three-week waiting period to access income assistance. That's one factor why people are out there on the streets.

The second thing they introduced was the two years of independence test. There are many young people, when they come out, who cannot prove they were independent for two years. Therefore, they are not eligible to access income assistance and also many employment opportunities.

They also introduced that you can only access income assistance for two years in five years. That is a policy which probably pushed many people out in Vancouver and many other parts of the province and made them homeless.

The member from Burrard is saying that I'm probably trying to exaggerate those homeless numbers. But I think this member doesn't need to go anywhere else. Just go in Vancouver and see the numbers, which have doubled in the last three years. That is the same in many other communities. In Surrey that number has gone up 140 percent. We never had a homelessness issue, but now we have over 450 people in Surrey.

Madam Speaker, this government has to show leadership and a clear commitment to work on the issue of poverty so that we can eliminate poverty in the province.

D. Routley: Leave to make an introduction, Madam Speaker.

Leave granted.

Introductions by Members

D. Routley: Thank you to the students of Island Oak High School from Duncan, who've joined us here in the chamber. I think they're hearing the quiet side of debate in the Legislature, but they're hearing how important the issues are that we deal with — poverty, homelessness, housing, education; all of these things that sometimes get a little more raucous during question period.

I hope they'll remember that it's the level of importance of the issue that raises the tone in here. There's so much at stake that depends on their involvement. I wish that all the members could welcome them to their House.

Private Members' Statements

CYCLING IN NANAIMO

R. Cantelon: I rise today to talk about an exercise and activity that would benefit everyone in this House and, in fact, could substantially improve the mood in the House. I'll talk about that a little later. I think it could be. We're Monday morning, and I already sense a bit of grumpiness as we approach the last two weeks of the session.

J. Horgan: Exuberance.

R. Cantelon: Exuberance, that's right. I mistook it for something else, and perhaps the perception was mine only.

[1035]

I had the opportunity to meet an old friend of mine, John Van Beek. I first met John some four years ago during Bike Week in Nanaimo. John's an avid biker. He's a member of the B.C. Cycling Coalition and the Greater Nanaimo Cycling Coalition. John's not a guy you want to try to outrun on the biking course, as I found out when I tried to go with him and take a tour to examine the bike trails in Nanaimo.

That was four years ago, and John hasn't lost his step. He's now 84 years old, but he still avidly bikes every day and is a leader in the community, espousing the benefits of cycling to everyone there.

Nanaimo city council has embraced the concept of cycling. It's part of the official community plan. They have extended the E&N Railway, which provides 22 kilometres of mostly level cycling, and throughout the community there are over 180 kilometres of cycling trails. It offers a lot of opportunities for people to do cycling in the city of Nanaimo.

It's a great exercise, but it's also a great commuter opportunity. People are more and more turning from their cars to their bikes to get to work and back.

There is one impediment, though, that I've been working with John and the B.C. Cycling Coalition on, and that is the trestle over the Millstone River. Now, as many of you may know, the railway gradients are excellent biking trails. I don't know what the maximum is. It's probably about 3 percent that is the maximum a train can haul freight up a slope, so it makes for a very, very easy bike path to parallel railway lines.

In Nanaimo there's one particular trestle over the Millstone River which is quite an exciting exercise to go around. In effect, you have to go down about a 30-degree slope and then up about a 20-degree slope. It's very stimulating, and it certainly is worthwhile to check your brakes before you take the detour around the Millstone River. We hope something can be done to accommodate that. It has taken over, and also in Qualicum Beach.

Mike Wansink is a city councillor in Qualicum Beach. Now he is facing a hip operation, and he realizes that he's going to have to go to a different type of exercise. Of course, biking has a lot less impact on your joints. It's a lot easier on the body to maintain physical condition. Mike now wants to identify the trails and slopes and gradients for future bike paths in the town of Qualicum Beach. I think that is going to be a welcome thing. It was passed by council.

There are many benefits. I think they're well known, and I look to the support of the House here to endorse the benefits of biking. Certainly, the obvious one is physical condition, and the reduction in the risks due to heart disease, blood pressure and diabetes. For a type 2 diabetic, regular cycling can maintain the blood sugar levels at an acceptable level.

Well, actually I did encounter.... You don't see any smokers who are biking. It's pretty hard to smoke and bike at the same time, and the other way around as well. The other thing you don't usually see is people trying to talk on the cell phone when they're biking. When I was biking regularly in Nanaimo, I occasionally tried it, and I can tell you the results are pretty much disastrous.

It kind of focuses your mind. It's not just a physical exercise. It's a mental exercise. You take a break. You smell the flowers. You feel the wind whistling through your hair — if you have hair. It can be a very relaxing exercise and put your mind in a different frame.

In fact, coming to the point I made earlier, one of the benefits of exercise is that it creates and stimulates hormones in your body called endorphins. These are the things that make you happy, more pleasant and easier to get along with.

I might suggest that it might be beneficial, instead of both sides of this House spending half an hour prepping to growl and gnash at each other during question period, that we spend the time, perhaps only once a week, taking a bike ride. A good, hard bike ride before question period might put us all in a more open frame of mind, to enable a more open and stimulated discussion. I think it might level the tone.

I see many smiling faces on the side opposite here, and some in my own caucus, that tell me that this is

probably a very beneficial change in procedure that we could consider. Even if we only did it once a year, it would be good, but once a week would certainly be very beneficial.

So it can improve your mood. Certainly, the health benefits are very, very important. It helps you maintain your weight. Cycle 30 minutes a week — basically the equivalent of 5 pounds of weight around your stomach over the course of a year. There's no question it can improve your health.

[1040]

I won't tell you it makes you live longer. We're all trying to fight the inevitable clock. Frankly, it's probably more a genetic code than anything else. It'll help you live your life better. You'll be more alert, in a better mood, healthier and more able to do things. Whatever time we're all given on this Earth, we'll get to enjoy it better. I think that's the critical thing.

I'm avoiding many of the references to partisan issues like ActNow, but obviously, ActNow is a very important program, and cycling is a very important part of that program. I think we all agree that we're concerned about obesity and fitness, particularly in our young people.

Most of us probably rode bikes to school. Now, of course, it seems to be the norm.... Fear of the unknown, fear of bad people, basically leaves all our children to take rides to school instead of biking. I think we need to break that chain and encourage all of our children to cycle as a very invigorating and worthwhile exercise.

It needs to be made more accessible and easier, so I challenge all our members, on both sides of the House — leaders in your community, as we all are — to take the initiative. There are many programs out now to fund and assist the construction of bicycle trails.

Go out, help your community, get it done, and get on a bike.

D. Cubberley: I certainly want to say that I share the sentiments expressed by the member for Nanaimo-Parksville. I, too, would like to congratulate Nanaimo and other communities that are making cycling part of their municipal plans and attempting to support it better.

Indeed, I have personal links to the history in Nanaimo, having spent a considerable amount of time there in the late '90s and the early part of the new century, initially to instigate the creation of the Greater Nanaimo Cycling Coalition, to help them identify a network of commuter routes in the community for improvement over time. I also was a founding member of the British Columbia Cycling Coalition, so I know the gentleman you were speaking of, who was also a founding member.

I certainly would want to congratulate Nanaimo, especially for having achieved the hitherto unprecedented act of gaining access to the E&N right-of-way to build a trail within it. The private railway company was very resistant to doing that, and they achieved that before it became a public asset.

I do want to say that while I agree with all the sentiments expressed on the other side, cycling is undoubtedly undervalued as a mode of transportation.

I welcome the member's recognition of it as a valuable activity, but I would like to hear him become an advocate for the upgrading of cycling infrastructure and not simply bike paths. Bike paths are wonderful, but the majority of cycling is not done on them. It's done on roads.

I didn't hear, in the discussion of the TransLink bill, anybody speaking on behalf of cycling or walking or creating any linkage of either of those two to transportation authorities. In fact, I heard the member for West Vancouver-Garibaldi speak quite passionately against the idea that a cyclist should have anything to do with planning transportation facilities for an urban region. I would welcome some advocacy on that side to try and correct the impression that cycling is a second-class citizen.

Again this weekend I heard the Premier going on about how British Columbians are energy gluttons. I really have to ask members opposite what else we could be. In a province where government does not invest substantially in low-carbon infrastructures that support walking, cycling and transit, how could it be otherwise?

Forty percent of our greenhouse gas emissions come from mobile sources — cars, buses and trucks. In Victoria it's over 50 percent, and I would say that's true for all the communities on the Island, like Nanaimo. Countering that requires more than doubling the current levels of transit use, walking and cycling, if we're going to bring greenhouse gas emissions down for the contribution of that sector. Remember, we're talking about a planetary emergency that the Premier, standing beside Al Gore, now acknowledges could in fact compromise human existence.

How do we get around today? Here's a snapshot of our region here. Weekday travel share: automobiles, 78 percent of all trips; transit, 6.4 percent of all trips; walking, 10 percent of all trips; cycling, 3.2 percent of all trips. That's the highest in Canada, by the way, for a mode share for cycling.

[1045]

Think of this. It takes tens of millions of dollars a year in Victoria to support transit to carry 6.4 percent of all trips, and we will have to more than double that in order to meet our targets. Yet in this region, where cycling is better tended than probably anywhere else in the province, perhaps a million dollars a year goes into it. Yet for that, cycling is carrying half the total of trips regionwide that all of that investment in transit takes. Undoubtedly, investing in cycling is a very good idea.

If we look at peak-hour travel, the picture gets even better. In Victoria bikes now have 7.7 percent of the peak-hour travel market regionwide. Transit is at 12.2 percent. So in the case of commuter travel, about 60 percent as many trips as are being carried on all the buses in the region than are being done on bicycles, with very low levels of investment. Clearly, cycling has a transportation potential.

What does government currently invest in cycling infrastructure, directly in bike lanes, in this province? Some \$1.7 million a year — not \$17 million, not \$170 million, but \$1.7 million.

Now, let's have a comparator. This is for something that can help us meet greenhouse gas reduction targets — \$1.7 million. How much did you find last year to give to private liquor distribution on an annual basis — the third gift since coming to office? Some \$25 million a year — bingo — every year is going quietly into private liquor distribution.

Where is the balance in this? I agree with the member. We should be investing in cycling. We have social reasons for doing it. Where is the balance?

R. Cantelon: I want to acknowledge and appreciate the member opposite for his work in Nanaimo in helping to establish the cycling coalition. I understand that he knows Mr. Van Beek well. I admire his attempts at logic and to somehow connect liquor distribution with biking. To me, it was a bit of a stretch, and I don't think I'll respond to that aspect of his comments.

I do agree with him that it can certainly be an alternative to transportation and will assist, of course, in reduction of greenhouse gases. Part of that is developing a healthy lifestyle — to make it part of your life and part of your routine. It's not just about exercise, and it's not just about commuting.

[Interruption.]

It's not just about cell phones going on inappropriately in the chamber.

What it is about is making it part of your regular routine so that it isn't a struggle and it isn't a burden. It's just something you do every day. You get to work. You get on your bike, and you get to your place of work.

Indeed, I will counter that the government is supporting this. I'm happy to see that our community in Nanaimo is taking full advantage of LocalMotion programs and other programs to lever money with 50-50 investments — in some cases higher contributions by the enthusiastic communities — to provide more bike trails to make commuting easier.

That, of course, was my point with the Millstone River. It's a bottleneck for commuting, and it would be something that certainly would improve commuting.

In Holland, Mr. Van Beek tells me.... It's quite interesting. He showed me a picture of the streets in Holland. It's something that we could emulate here. The most interesting aspect was that the bike paths on either side of the road were coloured a different colour.

Now, if you've driven around in Victoria, which no doubt is the leader in commuting in Canada, the bike paths are with a different, separated line. Unless you're a biker, it isn't obvious. I hope it's more obvious to cars, which probably it is since we don't seem to be running down bicyclists. But there, the interesting part was that the bike paths were coloured red, and there was no centre line in the middle of the road. Cars fend for themselves, but the bikers are given a priority.

To say that we're not doing something.... To the member opposite, I think the Gateway program is absolutely an outstanding example of our commitment and contribution. We are committing \$50 million to

bike paths. Our government is putting forward \$50 million to bike paths. That's going to be the biggest investment in cycling paths in the entire country.

This one investment shows our significant and singular commitment to alternatives to transportation, to get people out of their vehicles and to get them on the road. We're not saying to the worried car dealers here....

[1050]

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

R. Cantelon: Anyway, biking is a good thing. We thank you for your support.

SAFE TRANSPORTATION

G. Coons: I rise to discuss an issue of great concern to many in the north, and that's safe transportation. The 724-kilometre length of highway that runs from Prince George to Prince Rupert, dubbed the highway of tears, has unfortunately gained international attention. Dozens of women have gone missing or were found murdered along this highway. Most of the victims were young aboriginal women placed at risk due to a number of societal issues — whether it's racism, poverty or marginalization — that make young aboriginal women more vulnerable and prone to hitchhiking.

As a call for action, the first ever Highway of Tears Symposium was held 20 months ago in March 2006 in Prince George, bringing together families of the victims, numerous agencies, ministries, the RCMP, first nations, municipal representatives, many members from this Legislature and the public to identify areas that need to be addressed to prevent further victims and to help heal the hurt and pain that already exist.

The collective voice at the symposium was summarized in a report containing 33 recommendations to bring awareness, to engage youth, to prevent violence, to help identify gaps and needs in service, but more importantly, to ensure no more young aboriginal women get murdered along this deadly highway.

Carrier-Sekani Family Services have played a vital leadership role in both the symposium and with follow-up from the recommendations. Working out of their offices is the current highway of tears coordinator, Lisa Krebs. Her job is to act on the 33 recommendations, but it is a job that is too big for one person. Indeed, one of the recommendations from the symposium was to hire two coordinators. For now, Ms. Krebs works alone. The sheer size of the area and the huge task at hand make it vital that Krebs get at least one co-worker, especially now that the expansion of the investigation includes files from as far away as Kamloops and the Merritt area.

Many of the murdered women along the highway were impoverished aboriginal women. More than 50 have gone missing along this deadly highway between 1974 and 2006. People hitchhike out of routine or habit or because they can't afford the cost of a bus. Poor decisions are made one upon another until the worst-case scenario happens. A key recommendation was that a shuttle bus transportation service be established along the highway.

A year and a half ago I suggested that ministries work together and perhaps see if Northern Health Connections bus could be used.

It is certain that one person alone cannot turn around the underlying conditions and festering culture that travels along this haunted highway. A constituent of mine from Prince Rupert sent me her UVic education presentation. She stated: "I remember when Nicole Hoar went missing in 2002, but I don't remember hearing anything about the highway of tears before this. I knew that a few girls had gone missing, but I never knew the extent of the problem. Why did it take the police and government so long to acknowledge the problem and to issue warnings to those who frequent this road between Prince George and Prince Rupert?"

Aboriginal leaders have continually called for the RCMP and this government to create a task force to investigate the women lost along the highway. At the March 2006 symposium Dan George, the conference co-chair, said: "You talk to people in the hall, and they say that there are over 40 or 50 people who have gone missing over the past number of decades on this highway. If that doesn't warrant a task force, it begs the question: why not?"

Last month the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs president Stuart Phillip echoed this sentiment. To "not set up a properly designated and adequately resourced task force is to invite these tragedies to keep occurring. There's no RCMP task force, no concerted police effort, no evidence they are taking the disappearance of so many women, most of them aboriginal, seriously. The symposium recommendations have fallen on deaf ears," he said.

The Solicitor General, who attended the Highway of Tears Symposium, has indicated that he "takes the communities' concerns extremely seriously," and says "resources have never been an issue." If that is the case, why has the minister ignored repeated requests for funding? Hon. Speaker, it is shameful that this government has abandoned women of northern B.C. The victims' families do not deserve to be abandoned by an uncaring government.

Recently the minister also said that he thought the current activities were appropriate and that he had no requests from the Carrier-Sekani for additional funding. But Carrier-Sekani Family Services officials were shocked when told that the minister knew of no additional requests for funds. They had made several for ongoing funding. They still haven't received enough resources to ensure the coordinator's position or to properly distribute the workload entailed by the project. Officials say that they are constantly lobbying for more provincial money and aren't getting it.

Will this government take immediate action to ensure that there are enough resources so that all of the 33 recommendations of the symposium will be implemented? Who knows, hon. Speaker?

[1055]

A proposal is currently in front of the minister, on his desk, for the funding of two coordinators — one in Prince George, one in Prince Rupert — and an event coordinator to help implement the highway of tears

recommendations. Will action be taken on this? Shamefully, it appears that this government's commitment has collapsed, to the disappointment of the over 500 participants at the symposium.

The Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs also stated recently: "We cannot allow these tragedies to fall by the wayside. We must fully support the recommendations and prevent another tragic death." Mary Teegee, director for the Carrier-Sekani, says: "We need dedicated funding. We need the Premier to follow through on his new relationship."

If, as the minister says, he takes the community's concerns seriously and he cares, and if resources have never been an issue, let's not wait. Let's work collectively and collaboratively. Let's fully fund this initiative. Let's find solutions and save lives. Let's finally try to bring peace to the victims and their families.

We need to ensure that this road is safe. We need to implement community shuttle systems. We need to ensure that all the recommendations of the symposium are followed, and we need to ensure that families and communities who have lost daughters and loved ones have confidence in us in this House to do the right thing.

D. MacKay: It was with great interest that I listened to the member for North Coast talk about Highway 16 and the term that has now been attached to it — the highway of tears.

Back in the 1960s, '70s and '80s, when I was in the RCMP, I was stationed along the Highway 97 corridor for several years. While I was stationed at Williams Lake, I actually knew two young women who had gone missing and were later found. One of them happened to be a babysitter for my two children. She was living in Lac la Hache, which is a small community located south of Williams Lake. She was hitchhiking back to her family, and she went missing. She was found several months later in a shallow grave on the side of Highway 97. She had been killed.

That murder today is unsolved. As a matter of fact, that young lady's name appeared on the latest list of people who had gone missing along the Highway 97 corridor and for some reason is now showing up as a missing person from the Highway 16 corridor, when in fact it was along Highway 97. Regardless, it was a tragic and unnecessary death of a young lady who happened to live just outside of the major community of Williams Lake.

Another young lady who also shows up on the Highway 16 missing women's task force, Gloria Levina Moody from Bella Coola, was killed, actually on Highway 20, just out of Williams Lake on the road out to Bella Coola. Her body was located in a wooded area just a couple of miles out of Williams Lake.

I was involved in that investigation, and it took approximately 15 years from the time of her death before we got a deathbed confession from two people who had been involved in that particular homicide. Yet she shows up on the Highway 16 corridor as a missing person unsolved murder — again, a very tragic and unfortunate death.

She was a young native lady from the village of Bella Coola — two tragic deaths on Highway 97. There were numerous other deaths along the Highway 97 corridor when I was stationed in Williams Lake in the central part of British Columbia, which I recall from years past.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

When we get into the Highway 16 missing women's numbers, again it is a very tragic and unfortunate set of circumstances. I was a coroner after I retired from the RCMP and was involved in the recovery of human remains that were later identified as those of a young native girl from Moricetown. She had gone missing, hitchhiking between Moricetown and Smithers. Her remains were found just off Yelich Road near the Smithers airport.

[1100]

The unfortunate part about these young women who are going missing along the Highway 16 corridor is that it is days and weeks before the police are notified of the fact that these young women have gone missing.

In the case of the young lady that I just referred to from Moricetown, whom I was involved with as a coroner, we had human remains that consisted mainly of skeletal remains. There was no other evidence there. That body had remained in the bush for a number of years before a hunter accidentally stumbled across her remains. I guess the message I'm trying to get across here is that the evidence that is left when these young people go missing and aren't found for years or weeks later.... The evidence that the police have to work with is not very much.

We have a young person who has decided to hitchhike from Smithers to Moricetown or from Prince George to Prince Rupert — 740 kilometres of highway that has very few communities interspaced. It's a long road with small communities spaced. The Indian reserves where a lot of these young ladies have gone missing from are usually located outside the main centres of activity.

I think young people like to go where the action is on the weekends, and it's not uncommon for young people to go missing and not be heard of. Sometimes they'll show up weeks later. So when the member for North Coast talks about the RCMP doing nothing about these investigations, I have to take some exception to those comments. Police investigate all missing children.

G. Coons: In response to the member, I'm not saying the RCMP are not doing their job. It's the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs and the people who live in the communities that are frustrated with the lack of action on the issue. We don't need excuses; we need action. We need realistic, immediate action.

I think Dave Paulson from the Prince George *Citizen* nailed it with some recent comments. He said that the valuable work of Lisa Krebs must continue and be fully

supplemented and that the awareness raised by the highway of tears initiatives can't be allowed to wane. I heard nothing from the member of any commitment to pushing forward any initiatives or strategies or funding for the highway of tears. That's disappointing, and that's shameful for this government.

The government must demonstrate its long-term commitment by offering more than platitudes. Society will be better off when we accept it not just as a first nations issue but as everyone's problem, including the government's. It sounded like the member opposite was referring to some of the cases and that some of them had been solved.

I think I need to go through the list of names. Just a last comment before I go through some of the names of the victims is that my UVic constituent also expressed in her presentation: "It's beyond comprehension to me why these cases won't provoke society and our politicians to do something to ensure the future safety of women and at least try to address the deeper problems of marginalization, dispossession, impoverishment of those vulnerable women that place them in harm's way."

That constituent in that UVic program is my daughter. I agree with my daughter. We must work collectively and collaboratively to ensure the safety of young women along the highway of tears and to address the deeper societal problem that exists.

I'd like to acknowledge the 18 women that have gone missing, the forgotten souls: Monica Ignas, 15, last seen alive in 1974, west of Terrace; Alberta Williams, 24, last seen alive in Prince Rupert; Delphine Nikal, 15, missing since 1990; Ramona Wilson, 16, last seen alive 1994; Lana Derrick, 19, missing from Terrace since 1995; Roxanne Thiara, 15, found dead near Burns Lake; Alishia Germane, 15, found dead in Prince George in 1994. Nicole Hoar, 25, missing since 2002. Tamara Chipman, 22, missing outside of Prince Rupert.

Also recently added are Aielah Saric Auger, 14; Gloria Moody; Micheline Pare; Gale Weys; Pamela Darlington; Colleen MacMillen; Monica Jack; Maureen Mosie; and Shelly-Ann Bascu — missing from all over northern B.C.

As we sit here today, let's make a commitment that these women will never be forgotten.

[1105]

Hon. G. Abbott: I call private members' motions. I call Motion 69.

[Be it resolved that this House recognize Spirit Square communities throughout the province, and encourages community participation in their local Spirit Square celebrations of BC150 Years.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 69 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

Motions on Notice

150th ANNIVERSARY OF B.C. AND SPIRIT SQUARES PROGRAM

I. Black: In contemplating my remarks this morning on the Spirit Squares program, I thought it was worthy to reflect a little bit with respect to the circumstances in which we find ourselves today.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

We have circumstances worthy of reflection, and we have circumstances worthy of celebration. We are at a historical crossroads in so many ways. We have the demographics of our population that will affect our future in a way that is far greater than they have in the past, first with respect to immigration and also with respect to aging, which we've discussed many times in this House with its impact on many of our societal challenges and opportunities, not the least of which is our health care system.

We've also got issues economically that we've never faced before as our economy continues to roar along locally, and yet we've got challenges globally as economies in the east come to life and will impact us greatly. Our economy that we witness down to the south is challenging the citizens and leaders of that particular community.

Societally — well, there's an interesting thing I saw this morning. I was mindful of some of the comments of the members a little while ago. I saw advertising on the side of a bus on my walk over to the Legislature this morning. It was from an energy company locally that basically suggested a switch to their particular type of energy because it will help fight climate change. I thought to myself that that's not an ad we would have seen on the side of a bus 18 months ago or even 24 months ago, and maybe not even six or 12 months ago.

Certainly the awareness of the importance of climate change is something that has gripped our society, and it's beginning to impact social policy around the world. We're seeing that happen here in British Columbia as well.

We've also seen, at a societal level, material and historical advances in our relationships with our first nations community — not just embracing their historical contributions but also steadfastly standing with them as they face a future with all the opportunity and the challenge involved with leading their community and taking ownership of its destiny.

We're also on the verge of celebrating the 150th anniversary of British Columbia. That, of course, is a central theme to the motion that's on the floor this morning and indeed the Spirit Squares program that is supporting it. The opportunity that lies ahead and the excitement that's building with respect to the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games are no surprise to anyone.

Other cultures around the world have gathering places. Our country is, of course, relatively so very young. Other cultures have got this already ingrained

firmly in the fabric of their society. I come from a very British background, Scottish in particular. You don't have to talk to anyone who's been to the United Kingdom, never mind grown up or lived there for any period of time, to understand the value of the local pubs. They're a central place where people gather in the community seven days a week, and there are many elements that go well beyond just the enjoying of various beverages. There is actually outdoor seating for families and whatnot, which is a common place to find people on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

Churches, of course, have always been a famous place for gathering in older societies, as well as for various memorials marking historically significant events. I think of the Martin Luther King memorial in Atlanta. I think of the cenotaphs that we were all appropriately gathered at just a few days ago, and of course the sports stadiums. Many of these reflect the gradual growth and proliferation of small towns across North America. I think a little bit of the U.S., especially when I think of sports stadiums as well, that perhaps reflect their relative age to ours.

Our topic today of Spirit Squares might indeed be one of the things that will come to define a little bit about British Columbia and how we gather as citizens and as communities across this great province.

In my riding the city of Port Moody, one of the four municipalities that I represent, has one or two gathering places that have kind of evolved over time. One of them is the city hall itself, actually, due to its design, its central location and its proximity to the library. It's part of the actual structure of the city hall. The Inlet Theatre, which is a 300-person wonderful theatre, also serves as the council chambers, and of course the city offices.

[1110]

We have seen some of our community's great events take place there on an annual basis — the Hike for Hospice, supporting Crossroads Hospice. Hundreds of people come out once a year in May to do that annual event. We've also got the Terry Fox Run that gathers there.

This is significant because, of course, we sit in the shadow — and appropriately so, I suppose — of the magnificent Hometown Run in Port Coquitlam. Port Moody has its own, and more people every year gather at city hall in Port Moody and do their contribution to the critical role of raising awareness and funds for cancer research.

The second area in the community of Port Moody that serves as kind of a de facto gathering place is that of a little area called NewPort Village, what I jokingly refer to as kind of "Granville Island East" and a whole lot drier. It's got great density there. We've got seven towers of very highrise, concentrated density there. We've got pedestrian shopping — a wonderful little area where you can get everything you might need. And of course — perhaps a throwback to the U.K. roots — it's got a wonderful pub as well.

But they weren't designed that way. They've become de facto gathering places, but they weren't designed. I think that's where this morning's motion and indeed the Spirit Squares program begin to speak of planning

and forward-looking. See, we're a government who believes in supporting municipalities not just financially, by funding their individual priorities, but in terms of working in partnership on projects that reflect a mutual vision.

This government in the six short years of its term has illustrated unprecedented support and cooperation with municipalities across British Columbia. We've shown our belief in reinvesting in our municipalities and supporting their vision. We've shown our belief in helping to fund projects like those that are very appropriate for senior-level government support.

Our list of initiatives and broad-based funding programs has steadily grown to be the envy of every other province in this country. I include in that, for example, our Towns for Tomorrow program, the Local-Motion program that was spoken about so eloquently by the member for Nanaimo-Parksville just a few moments ago, and the enormously popular municipal rural infrastructure program.

This commitment has made a real difference in our communities. I think of the East Road construction challenge in Anmore leading to Buntzen Lake, where 700,000 people throughout the Tri-City area and the Burnaby area come to visit a marvellous recreational site. For ten years nothing was done to solve the problem of a dilapidated and subsequently dangerous road, because it fell between the cracks. It was not covered by the TransLink purview, and it was not covered by the Ministry of Transportation because it was not part of the GVRD road network.

It became a safety issue such that TransLink almost pulled the buses on it just a few months ago. Well, our government came through with the million and a half dollars that are necessary because of the types of programs that we drive through our various programs to the municipalities and to service their needs.

I think of the Westhill pedestrian and cycling path — again, a throwback to the remarks earlier on the importance of cycling in our community. It's a \$350,000 investment to turn a trail into an area that will take pedestrians away from a very dangerous high-traffic area in Port Moody and that will give a phenomenal walk in behind the hills of Port Moody, just underneath Simon Fraser University, connecting people over the Barnett Highway.

I also think of the accessible playground in Coquitlam's Town Centre Park, in cooperation with not just the city of Coquitlam but also the marvellous work of volunteering that's done by the Kinsmen and Kinettes in British Columbia.

I think of the alternative energy pilot that's being done in the small village of Anmore, showing that small communities have an enormous amount to offer in terms of creativity, trying to solve problems that are far greater than simply the size of the population that they might represent.

Of course, I think of our traffic fine revenue return program, taking it from 25 percent of the fines collected to 100 percent, which has made a material difference in every community affected throughout British Columbia. In

our particular case, that has meant over \$6 million. That's the incremental difference. The additional difference, \$6 million, is going back to the cities and the leaders of the Tri-City community.

Now, taking stock of these Crossroads and the various commitments we have in this area, the Premier announced yet another strong partnership program with our municipalities: the Spirit Squares program. The vision behind the Spirit Squares program is one where, by establishing attractive physical locations for people to gather and by doing so in a forward-thinking manner that involves good urban planning and encourages healthy choices for our citizens — focused on, for example, population density, pedestrian-friendly design, energy efficiency and healthy living options — we can celebrate and reflect on who we are as British Columbians and who we'd like to be.

It gives us a chance to show how we're very, very unique as we show the pride of our individual cities and towns. I think of my friend and colleague who made a great presentation on Pouce Coupe last time we sat. What a marvellous tribute it was to his small town and how unique it was, and the pride that's obviously taken by those citizens in what they can accomplish together. It also shows how reunited as a larger community of Canadians and a larger community of British Columbians....

[1115]

This helps not just to define gathering places, but in conjunction with city planning it will encourage — if not indirectly force — the development of residences and shops around it. If we do this right, it will become a desirable place to frequent, with or without a formal program, announcement or celebration being planned.

The result of all this was the Spirit Squares program. To make this vision a reality, the government put aside \$20 million and have so far funded the Spirit Squares envisioned by 29 communities from every corner of British Columbia. In my riding, the city of Coquitlam was the recipient of one of these grants of half a million dollars.

In the particular case of Coquitlam, I think this is a great example of how Spirit Squares are going to be done right. It's done in partnership. It's done with a lot of cooperation with other groups in the community. In the case of the Coquitlam example, it's in cooperation with, or it will be part of, a development being driven by an organization called Bosa Development.

They're building something called Westwood village. It involves great densification in and around the city hall area of Coquitlam. It's designed from the outset to be an integrated project, to help build integrated communities.

It's got lots of community partners involved too — not just the city, not just the provincial government and not just the developer. It's got, incorporated right into it, the brand-new seniors centre — right into the plans. The Bosa organization has donated the concrete, steel and labour at cost, and we all know what has happened to concrete, steel and labour costs in the last two and a half years.

The individual who is leading the seniors centre is a gentleman by the name of Mr. Elmer Falconer. He's been chair of what's called the Pinetree 50-plus Society, their planning committee. Their new facility, as part of this broader complex, will be over 16,000 square feet, and it's set to open shortly, in December.

It was financed, incidentally, in part by yet another contribution by this government, a \$2 million grant from the community development infrastructure program of B.C. — again, cooperation with the city; again, assisting municipalities to define their direction and their future; and again, positioning Coquitlam's Spirit Square to be a vibrant, active and central part of the future of the Tri-Cities community.

The Spirit Squares will help us look back with pride and with reverence and forward with anticipation and with excitement. You know, I can envision our past. With the Olympics so close at this stage, I think of people like Tracy Wilson, Olympic bronze medallist from Port Moody. The Spirit Square in the Tri-Cities could have been a place where we could have celebrated when Tracy came home and thrown a great party for her.

I also think of our future, another Olympian-to-be, Ivette Gonda, a tae kwon do athlete from Port Moody, most valuable player at the 2006 senior nationals, the MVP at the 2002 junior nationals, four-time Canadian champion between 2003 and 2006. She became the second Canadian to ever compete in tae kwon do at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, where she placed fifth.

I can tell you that she's got her eyes on the podium. We're going to be cheering her on all the way. If the Tri-Cities wants to throw her a party when she goes for the gold and gets it, I can think of no better place to celebrate than a Spirit Square.

I'm a big supporter of the torch relay that's been part of the Olympic Games that are coming. I am one of the MLAs in our area that has made it clear to support the chamber of commerce drive to get the torch relay to come through our community, and I can think of no better place than the Spirit Square to celebrate that momentous occasion.

I think back to the 1994 playoff runs with the Vancouver Canucks and the agony of that. I thought to myself: you know, when we go at it again and we make it to the big dance of the Stanley Cup final, what a great place to celebrate that achievement when we bring home the cup.

Interjection.

I. Black: It will not be the Boston Bruins, despite the remarks of one of my colleagues across the aisle from me. It will be the Vancouver Canucks. I am a believer that that day will come.

With the Olympics, of course, we're going to have live telecasts and medal ceremonies. Again, where better to pull people together and celebrate the excitement of such a momentous world-class event?

In conclusion, the construction and celebration of Spirit Squares throughout B.C. shows clearly that through

vision and leadership and through unprecedented funding and cooperation with partners at the municipal level, we've got the opportunity to do something very, very special and very, very lasting. Every community has moments to celebrate, moments where reflection is appropriate.

I'm proud to be part of a government that commits to communities across the province with programs such as this to help them define those moments, to give them a common gathering place and a chance to accomplish what is becoming increasingly harder in our technology-centric and information-self-sufficient society — that is, to bring people together, to build relationships across interest groups and cultures, and to give an opportunity to define in a meaningful way who we are as British Columbians.

[1120]

L. Krog: I must say I want to thank the member for providing — how shall I say? — a broad spectrum with which the opposition can reply to his remarks. The actual motion talked about recognizing Spirit Square communities throughout the province and encourages unique participation in their local Spirit Square celebrations. He talked about it being a place where you would bring people together.

Well, I would suggest strongly to the member opposite that if there are squares across this province developed by this government with its initiatives, it will be a great place to bring people together to protest the lack of support for communities and housing and the homeless all across this province. They will be wonderful places for us to gather and protest what this government hasn't done. They will be wonderful places for those people who don't have much to celebrate after 150 years of British Columbia.

You know, it's kind of like the bread and circuses thing all over again. "We're going to celebrate the Olympics. Everything's going to be grand." And yet the one thing we can say definitely about the downtown cores of communities across this province today in 2007 is that we've got more homeless people on the streets of British Columbia today than we've ever had.

I'm sure the government wants to celebrate that. I'm sure they're just delighted with all the goodness they've wrought for the most disadvantaged in our society. As the people who have been flushed out of the institutions across this province gather — mentally ill, drug addicted, homeless, hungry and starving — they'll have a Spirit Square in which to gather and celebrate 150 years of British Columbia. Well, it's marvellous.

There is nothing wrong with the concept of the commons, and that's what you're talking about when you talk about a square. The member mentioned his British heritage, although I hesitate to tell him that if you talk about being British for heaven's sake, if you mention you're Scottish.... You've got to be one or the other. You can't be both. But that's a side issue.

Even under the days of absolute monarchy, we recognized there would be a commons where the lowest tenant farmer could let a cow graze, where they could

gather for fairs and celebrations to enjoy what were pretty miserable lives. What was it the great British writer said — nasty, brutish and short were their lives?

Here we are, hundreds of years advanced, technology our handservant, living in a time of great prosperity and low unemployment. Yet there is more visible poverty in our communities cluttering, if you will, our modern commons, which are our streets and courthouse squares and the parks of our communities. We see it all the time. You can walk a few feet from this Legislature, a few hundred feet at night, and you'll be able to see people sleeping in our commons — not housed, not cared for but forgotten.

I would much rather the Premier, in his great wisdom, would have actually thought of maybe shovelling a little more money over to the Minister of Forests and Range, who I'm sure would have been happy to spend it on public housing. I'm sure the Minister of Forests and Range and Minister Responsible for Housing would have been delighted to receive some of the Spirit Square money.

Hon. Speaker, the greatest celebration you could give British Columbians would not be announcements about Spirit Squares. It would be an announcement about a commitment in a time of prosperity to actually, really and truly address the issues of housing, homelessness and poverty in our province. That would be something to celebrate. That would honour those thousands of immigrants who came to this country over time, who came to this province, who created the towns and the cities and the villages out of the forests of this province, who created communities. That would be a celebration. That would be a celebration of community spirit — to actually do something for the community.

Communities are created out of care and love and concern. Communities are about neighbourhoods. Communities are about people and relationships with one another.

[1125]

You cannot celebrate 150 years of the building of communities in this province when so many have been forgotten and live in such disadvantaged circumstances today.

Other aspects of the commons, of course, are things like B.C. Hydro and B.C. Ferries. That's the commons, hon. Speaker. That's the collectivity, if you will. That's what we've developed as a society, understanding that if we do things collectively, through government, we can achieve things that we cannot individually do for ourselves.

You know what? There's not a member in this place that could provide a ferry service for British Columbians — not one of us. Collectively, however, we can provide a wonderful ferry service. W.A.C. Bennett recognized that. He'd be chagrined today to see this privatized model of the commons, as he would have understood it, being treated the way it is, being used as an excuse for government to fob off increasing ferry fares and transportation costs which are going to damage the Gulf Islands.

If you want to talk about the commons, citizens over there on Gabriola Island have actually purchased land, and they call it the commons. They want to restore a sense of community that existed once in this province in every small town, where they had true commons. They are to be complimented.

But with increasing ferry fares, they may see a real change in their communities. The only people who'll be able to live there will be those who can afford, essentially, what are becoming gated communities. When the ferry fares keep rising, younger families, poorer people and people with fixed incomes won't be able to afford to live there.

If you want to help the commons, do something for B.C. Ferries. If you want to help the commons, put B.C. Hydro back into real public control and stop privatizing it. If you want to help people in British Columbia, don't build Spirit Squares.

It's a nice idea. Do something really useful with the money. Do something really useful. Do something that will actually benefit those amongst us who aren't sharing in the celebration. There are more of them, and they are virtually in every community of any size in this province in ways we've never seen before throughout our history.

Now, that's the kind of Spirit Square I'd like to see, hon. Speaker. Someplace where every community could announce that it was building some new public housing, some assisted-living facilities, something to actually benefit people. Then the next step would be a real Spirit Square where we could all, as community members, go down, gather and celebrate that we had demonstrated those values of community and sharing and caring that built this province.

You know, we used to raise barns in this province, believe it or not. We used to do all kinds of things as communities. We didn't let one another slide below the surface, disappear from our minds. We knew when our neighbours were sick. We knew when they needed help. That's the B.C. spirit. That's the real B.C. spirit.

I challenge the government to step up to the plate. If they want to celebrate 150 years of British Columbia history, let them step up to the plate and develop real communities across this province, instead of these fluffy Spirit Squares which aren't going to do a darned thing to make the lives of British Columbians any better.

J. McIntyre: I rise, of course, to support the motion brought forward this morning about support for the Spirit Square communities throughout our province.

I have to say, before I make my remarks, that again you can tell by some of the chuckling and remarks in the House.... It's difficult to believe that you can take a topic as uplifting as Spirit Squares and all that they have to offer for the citizens of this province to celebrate our diversity and legacy and neighbourhoods and communities and all the wonderful things that are going on.... The opposition can take something like this topic and turn it, yet again, into another doom-and-gloom scenario. It's quite amazing. Anyway, I'll leave it at that.

I'd like to speak positively about this motion. Our government's notion of Spirit Squares carries the whole notion of the importance of a central gathering place in communities for townspeople, for neighbours, for citizens. It takes it to a higher level than the general importance that we already attribute to a central gathering place and an opportunity for communities to come together.

It focuses on uniting communities. It enables people to explore, to reflect, to learn much more about the various cultures and the diversity within our local communities. Our communities have changed in 100 years in this province. We're very diverse. We have people from all around the world — many languages offering and embracing different cultures.

[1130]

We're becoming a different province, and we have an opportunity to share that and reflect on it, celebrate it and enjoy it. It's one of the wonderful privileges of living in British Columbia. We have an opportunity to do this. I just can't believe that we wouldn't have everybody in this House very supportive of this program.

Not only does it do that, it's also taken it to a new level where we're developing greener and healthier places to live. I mean, the importance of gathering, of having pedestrian pathways, walkways — areas for us who live in denser, concrete areas and to still have these central gathering places.... We're talking about transforming society. We're asking our citizens to think about how we live, and we're asking our local governments to think about how we develop and how we make communities safer, healthier. These Spirit Squares are symbolic of all of that. They are a positive way in which we're moving.

I worry sometimes. We live in a society where we're cocooning. We talk all about the cocooning phenomena. We read stories in the media that we're becoming increasingly isolated. We have seniors isolated. We have stories about children being alone, absorbed in computer games and not socializing the way we all did.

I remember being out in what we actually called the "blind alley" in our neighbourhood, where no cars could come along. We were out there after school playing relievo, tennis, touch football and everything else the way all kids used to play many years ago. I appreciate that I might be dating myself. Nowadays we have children who are not enjoying those kinds of activities in random social gatherings.

The fact that we're having opportunities for communities to gather — citizens, children, families to come together.... I just can't think that we shouldn't all be celebrating this. We need these centres. We need these places in our communities that can become the heart of the community, that can be the centre of community activities, where we can actually ignite community spirit and pride.

Let me speak for a few moments about West Vancouver's case. Actually, I made a two-minute statement in the House recently on West Vancouver's

Spirit Square. They're one of the lucky — and I say fortunate — communities, where they have received a grant. They received the maximum \$500,000 grant on a 50-50 cost-sharing basis, where we can share between the levels of government.

What they're building, what they're planning and their view — right from the community — of how and what they could celebrate through the concept of a Spirit Square is magnificent. They've got a fantastic plan for the Spirit Square in West Van. It will be a legacy for the next 150 years.

It's going to be formed by creating a 325-square-metre atrium that's connecting the whole new community centre that they're already building. They're going to join it with the aquatic centre that was replaced a couple of years ago. It's going to adjoin what they're calling the south plaza, which will have a dramatic rock fountain that's been donated by a benefactor. It will have a huge great lawn and all sorts of informal seating areas.

The most amazing feature is that they're going to have fully retractable walls that seamlessly connect this atrium, which will be the heart of this civic site, to the surrounding outdoor gathering spaces. Combined, it will hold up to 9,000 people. It's a fantastic legacy, I think, and an area that this community will use for all sorts of celebrations year-round for many, many years to come.

The plans for the north plaza of this whole site will include a musical garden with seating, chimes, wind gongs and talking tubes — all sorts of ways for people to be able to relate and talk to each other. The site will also be further enhanced by displaying public art that's going to be commissioned in partnership with the Squamish Nation.

I want to take a moment to thank both West Vancouver district, actually, and the Squamish Nation. Over the past year or two, certainly since I've been a MLA, I've seen unprecedented efforts to highlight both the historic and the future relationship between West Van citizens and the Squamish Nation.

I participated, over the last year, in three or four different activities where West Van had taken some of the money that they received from their federal cultural capital grant in 2006 and spent significant funds on developing what they called a sculpture symposium.

They included first nations. They commissioned art. There's a fantastic new steel sculpture in Ambleside Park that was done by a local Squamish Nation sculptor, Xwa-lack-tun. It's a tribute. It will, again, be a lasting tribute to the relationship and to bridging the cultures between the Squamish First Nation and the non-aboriginal population in West Van.

[1135]

This Spirit Square in West Van, I think, will absolutely assist in both consolidating and showcasing the aboriginal and non-aboriginal relationship we have in our community. We all know the intangible benefits that the arts can provide to us intellectually, emotionally and physically.

In closing here, before I part, the member for Port Moody–Westwood raised the whole issue of the connection with some of the Spirit Squares to the Olympics, to B.C. actually hosting the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. West Vancouver, as you may well know, is also a host venue city. At Cypress Mountain we'll be hosting the aerials and the snow-boarding events.

West Vancouver is very excited about that. We have the next few years leading up to 2010 and then many years beyond to be able to use these Spirit Squares as central places where we can be celebrating the coming of the activities through our North Shore spirit committee and all the many things that are connected before and after hosting the games in our community. This Spirit Square will be a lasting legacy associated with that as well.

I think the connection of these Spirit Squares to things like 2010 and also to the fact that we're celebrating our 150th anniversary as a founding colony next year, the whole opportunity to do this and to actually ignite, as I said earlier, community pride.... I can't think of a better legacy for our children and grandchildren than the whole notion of Spirit Squares.

M. Karagianis: I rise today to respond to the discussion here on Spirit Squares. I find it really interesting to listen to the previous speaker, the member for Port Moody–Westwood, who began to outline his comments with reference to the issues we're currently facing today in society.

The member talked about the economy and about immigration and about aging and about climate change, and all of those are true and relevant issues that face us today. Then the member went on to talk about the Spirit Squares as somehow tying together a thread through each of these issues and in fact even discussed the role that this program and its grants will play at the municipal level and what a significant impact it will have on urban planning.

I was quite fascinated by the approach that the member has taken in seeing the Spirit Squares program as somehow a cure-all for a whole number of ills that face us today in society. Then the member for West Vancouver–Garibaldi stood up and immediately sort of berated the opposition for somehow turning this debate into a doom-and-gloom story.

It's very interesting to me that the members on the other side of the House are not afraid to make references to climate change and to aging and to the economy and immigration and urban planning and all the other things that face us today, but they somehow only want to look at that as a one-dimensional aspect. It strikes me very much that this is a bit of an isolated view of the world.

I was recently reading a discussion on what's called the Pollyanna syndrome, and that is where everything in the world is approached from a very one-dimensional.... You know, be happy, and the world will somehow follow your mood and your directive, and all things will be fine. Don't look at the doomy-and-

gloomy side of life, and don't look at the problems of life. In fact, just be happy, and all will be well.

In the context of the previous speaker's comments, I look at the 150th celebration here in this province as one where we take a look at all aspects of our communities, all aspects of our society and all aspects of what 150 years in this province has brought us to. That is a two-faceted story. It is not all about Pollyanna's view of the world that everything is nice, and we're all glad and happy — that Spirit Squares are somehow the great panacea for the masses.

[1140]

Don't get me wrong. Spirit Squares. I have several of my communities who have put in application for Spirit Square grants, and they are still waiting to hear of those. I heard the previous speaker talk about hundreds of thousands of dollars being invested in some communities — not all communities. While communities within my riding in fact can't move forward with any of the celebratory plans they have for gathering places in their communities or for great uses in their communities, I'm struck by members of the House standing up and talking about how hundreds of thousands of dollars have been given to their communities.

I stood in the House not too long ago and talked about an investment in the Japanese garden on the Gorge waterway as a celebration and a tribute to a part of our history with Japanese Canadians and how that celebration is tainted with the way Japanese Canadians were treated here in Canada and the loss of their possessions and, in fact, the creation of the Takata Gardens and the initiative by my community to try and replace that and to pay homage to that.

Certainly, while communities are waiting for some kind of confirmation on whether or not they will get Spirit Squares money.... Let's hope it doesn't go the way of booster seats and that it's far too selective in where the money's invested. Far be it from me to be quite so pessimistic as to think that we will see much more investment in some Liberal-held ridings than we will in non-Liberal-held ridings.

I would say that as we approach the 150th anniversary of this province, we have got to look very clearly at what our priorities are. I would say that the whole concept of Spirit Squares as somehow being the great healer, the great cure-all for all of our social ills, whether it be climate change or aging or all the other things that the previous members have talked about....

In fact, it's my contention that we have got our priorities skewed, that our priorities leading into the 150th anniversary should be about finding ways to invest in all of those things that are the doom-and-gloom side of our society, many of them created in the last six years in this province. What comes to mind immediately — the kinds of investments that hundreds of thousands of dollars into my community would actually deliver are much better results and a much better celebration of 150 years of this province — would be investments in seniors care.

It is no secret to this House or this province that seniors care is being compromised day after day here

in this province. It is a growing concern, as we have a growing aging and we have a growing number of seniors. The reduced services and care of seniors in this province should be of utmost concern to every single one of us in this House.

If we want to celebrate something in this province, it should be celebrating the seniors who built this province. They are the biggest component of what we should be celebrating in a 150-years celebration here in British Columbia. Instead, what do we have? We have seniors care being compromised. We have seniors being abused right now in this province in the very care situations that they have relied on this province to provide.

We have not provided safe and secure care for seniors in this province. We have let them down. That is not anything we should be celebrating. In fact, that's where we should be putting investment in the province today — home care for seniors, for all those seniors who have lived rich and independent lives and who with a small amount of home support could continue to do that.

We could continue to celebrate their involvement in our communities, their wisdom and their long-term commitment and support that built this province. A small investment in replacing the home care that has been undermined by this government in the last six years would be truly a way to celebrate 150 years and the seniors in our province.

I had a constituent in my office just recently, talking about her concern about funding cuts to Kiwanis Pavilion here in Greater Victoria. Her husband is there with growing dementia, and she was very concerned about the quality of care that he is receiving. This is an individual who spent his entire life working hard, serving in the Armed Forces in this country, and who deserves to have the most appropriate and supported and the best possible care in his final years that any of us are capable of providing here in this province. Instead, we have his wife very concerned about the cuts to the Kiwanis Pavilion here.

[1145]

When I hear those stories coming through the door, I realize that we cannot be superficial in the way we approach investment into our communities. Spirit Squares sound like a grand idea, but while seniors go wanting for proper care and while constituents are concerned about the kind of care their loved ones will receive in situations like the Kiwanis Pavilion, then I think we haven't done enough.

Of course, situations like the Mary Manning Centre.... I have stood in this House many times, as have many members in opposition, and talked about the situation at the Mary Manning Centre. So while we're investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in some communities for a celebration leading into the Olympics and a celebration of 150 years in this province, we are failing to invest in organizations like Mary Manning, which in fact supply an essential service to children who have been sexually abused in this province.

Instead, we're prepared to let them wait months and months on a waiting list. We are prepared to actually

ignore that aspect of a need in this province while we talk frivolously about Spirit Squares.

I am not opposed to the program for Spirit Squares. In fact, I celebrate in my community, and I help my community celebrate in as many ways as possible. As a municipal councillor, I invest in the celebrations of my community. But I think that if we are truly celebrating 150 years, if that's what this is all about, then we've got to get our priorities right. We've got to make sure that at that 150th anniversary, we are taking care of seniors, we are taking care of sexually abused children, we are taking care of the homeless, and we are taking care of all those problems that are currently our responsibility in this province.

That is truly how we celebrate in conjunction with our communities. It is to make sure that those Spirit Squares are not filled with homeless people, to make sure that those Spirit Squares are not the centres of protest and concern because centres like the Mary Manning are not getting the funding that they require, to make sure that those gathering places are not a statement on how the province has let them down in communities.

M. Polak: I want to start by reading the resolution, the motion, one more time.

Be it resolved that this House recognize Spirit Square communities throughout the province, and encourages community participation in their local Spirit Square celebrations of BC150 Years.

I wanted to read that because today, as my colleague the member for Fort Langley–Aldergrove will be aware, is Douglas Day, November 19. Today is the day when in my riding, and in the riding of the member for Fort Langley–Aldergrove, we celebrate the fact that in 1858 Sir James Douglas signed the proclamation to create British Columbia as a Crown colony.

I should comment, just because we're talking about Crown colonies and it seems apropos, to the member for Nanaimo that Britain actually includes Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales. I just thought I'd add that in there. Sir James Douglas, with a name like that, was probably Scottish, and that gets us to our British heritage.

Interjection.

M. Polak: The member for Port Moody–Westwood is glad to acknowledge that Britain does include Scotland.

On Douglas Day the birth of British Columbia took place, and in Fort Langley that's extremely important. We have the fort in Fort Langley that was there at the time when this proclamation was put in place, and every year we celebrate by honouring those pioneers who contributed to the building of our great province.

Notwithstanding the fact that the member for Nanaimo says, "Don't build Spirit Squares," there are a lot of other communities around this province, including Fort Langley and Langley, who really do see the importance of this. I'll just quote a couple of them.

Butch Dick of the Esquimalt Nation says in the *Victoria Times Colonist*: "It not only validates me as an artist, but

validates the people whose traditional territory we're on, which is the Songhees Nation."

We have the mayor of Campbell River, Roger McDonell. He says: "When Premier Campbell made his speech about Spirit Squares at last year's Union of British Columbia Municipalities convention, we thought he'd been reading our downtown plans. This project will make more people want to move into the area, which will create a demand for residential development in the downtown core."

[1150]

Then again, we have the mayor of Cumberland, Fred Bates: "Our community and our industry and our citizens are all there with us, and we all have the same vision. Not only is this appreciated, but it will be put to good use."

I know that when it came to the announcement of the Spirit Square in Langley city in my riding at Douglas Park, one of the comments that was made to me by the mayor and by a particular councillor who'd been looking at this park for some time and wanting to enhance it was: "How did you know? How did you know that this would be such an important program to us and that we were, in fact, looking at trying to do something with this gathering place in the centre of our city?"

In fact, for Langley city, that meant \$407,500 as a contribution from our province to help to revitalize a park that has been a gathering place for many years but that has recently been difficult for the city to afford on its own to fix up and revitalize and make a true gathering place.

There are a lot of people that were proud of what happened when we announced the Spirit Square in Fort Langley — the one that will be there at the fort. There are a lot of people who believe in what we're doing. That day we had hundreds of people out, and who were they — the ones who believe in this project? Well, I'll tell you, there were people from all age groups. They believe in the project. There were the people who volunteer their time at the fort to run the historic exhibits. They believe in the project. Then there were the volunteers who are part of spirit committees who are working on developing community celebrations for B.C.'s 150th. They believe in it.

I think what I was most proud of was to see that we had representatives from the Kwantlen First Nation at that announcement. They stood there to pray for us, to give their blessing. They believe in this project because it means something tangible to a community. It not only gives us the ability to celebrate things such as our great heritage and history, but it's a chance to celebrate the way in which we'd be able to come together as a community and support other projects, other worthy ones. I want to highlight a couple of those.

This is about celebrating how 150 years later we can work together as a province, TransLink and a number of other organizations, including the city of Langley, to build an overpass that was sorely needed. This is the way we can work together to bring forward a new homeless shelter in Langley called the Gateway of Hope. It's going to have emergency shelter beds, transition housing. It's

cutting edge in terms of a community the size of Langley, because we're able to work together with B.C. Housing and a contribution from the province.

Last of all, when I think about all the different celebrations that can take place in these Spirit Squares — and I'm proud that they're going to be there for 2010, for B.C.'s 150th, for our returning hockey team — what I'm most proud of is that when it comes to events such as the annual candlelight vigil we hold for Ishtar Transition House, we can now have a place to gather that just isn't in front of a mall but that is in a place that recognizes the true importance of supporting those most in need in our community.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

In closing, these Spirit Squares are certainly about celebrating our history and heritage, but they're also about celebrating the great goodwill and community work that is around our province and that truly shows our spirit as we help those less fortunate and as we celebrate our ability to do that as a community.

N. Macdonald: Thank you for the opportunity to speak about what truly brings communities together, and I want to talk about a need unmet. B.C. arts councils need more funding. Again this year the Finance Committee has unanimously called for increased funding for arts councils.

The figure put forward by the arts councils is \$32 million, and it's a fair figure. The funding of arts councils is an incredibly efficient and effective way of moving dollars to support art activities in not only our major centres but also our small communities.

Within this House, we have people on both sides who are committed to strengthening the arts. I've heard the member from Port Moody perform. I think we all did. He's a talented keyboard artist and obviously comes from a home that values music, and I expect it is a love that he'll pass on to his family.

Travelling through rural areas, I meet with arts council representatives and tell them to not give up on the Finance Committee process. The arts community, I feel, was poorly served by the last budget, despite recommendations to increase funding by the previous Finance report. Again, the Finance Committee has recommended an increase.

[1155]

I have met with the Minister of Tourism, Sport and the Arts in meetings and in estimates and made it clear that we in the NDP strongly support funding for our community arts councils through the B.C. Arts Council. I would say that again to the Minister of Finance as she prepares her budget.

I see, in each of the communities I represent, arts councils that pull the communities together through public

performances of music, poetry or with art presentations. They give people a chance to enjoy, to participate, to present, to perform, to learn about the arts. All of these things contribute to quality of life. Quality of life may be intangible and difficult to measure, but it is an important part of our communities.

With that, I say clearly that the Legislature must see an increase in funding to the B.C. Arts Council in the next budget. It is the right thing to do.

Mr. Speaker: Member for Bulkley Valley–Stikine, noting the hour.

D. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I will be short.

I notice that the member for Nanaimo took his pills this morning that turned him into a negative person, and it is so discouraging when that happens. He should actually take a look at a book called *The Power of Positive Thinking* before he comes into this chamber.

The member for Nanaimo also mentioned Thomas Hobbes, and I just want to bring to the chamber's attention that Mr. Hobbes was talking about life without government, without society and without social network. He said that the natural condition of mankind is what would exist if there was no government, no civilization, no laws or no common power to restrain human nature.

Spirit Squares are provided there to give people a chance to create the sense of community, to keep life from being "nasty, brutish and short." I'm glad the member for Nanaimo is listening to that. When I think about Spirit Squares, I don't think about all the negative things in life. I think about the South Pacific. I've travelled to the South Pacific several times now, and I've enjoyed going to community squares, where people have a chance to sit down and share what's happened in their lives, what's happened in the community, what is happening. There's so much positive that can come from community squares, Spirit Squares, which we are talking about today.

I have so much more to say. I'd like to carry on, Mr. Speaker, but I know you're getting hungry, as are other members in this chamber, so I'll move adjournment of debate.

D. MacKay moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until 1:30 this afternoon.

The House adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

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