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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

THIRD SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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Honourable Bill Barisoff

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THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2007

The House met at 1:36 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Introductions by Members

J. Horgan: Joining us in the gallery today are a number of constituents from Malahat–Juan de Fuca. Firstly, the mayor of Sooke, Janet Evans, and she's joined by her chief administrative officer Evan Parliament. We're also joined by a famous resident of the Highlands, a good constituent of mine, Vicky Husband.

Would the gallery and the House please make them welcome.

Hon. S. Bond: We are delighted today to have three people in the Legislature in the gallery with us that have really worked to make a difference in British Columbia. They've made a special effort to be here today because they are looking so forward to royal assent later this afternoon.

They're here to celebrate the passing of the First Nations Education Act, and I know all members of the House who supported that bill will be very pleased to welcome today Tyrone McNeil, who is the president of the First Nations Education Steering Committee; Nathan Matthew, who is the chief negotiator; and Christa Williams, the executive director.

Each one of these people has contributed for a very long time to bring this to the place we're at today. I'm so thrilled they made the time to come to the gallery to witness this afternoon. Thank you for joining me in making them welcome.

L. Krog: Joining us in the gallery today is Julian West. He's the federal NDP candidate for Saanich–Gulf Islands, and accompanying him is Howard Green, one of my constituents. Would the House please make them welcome.

Hon. B. Penner: I'd like the House to please welcome Loyola Sullivan, Canada's Ambassador for Fisheries Conservation, and a senior adviser, Michele Tomlinson-Wells. Also joining them today is Cathy Hohnsbehn, the executive administrative assistant to my assistant deputy minister in our oceans and marine fisheries division.

They're seated in the gallery, and I would ask the House to please make them welcome.

R. Fleming: With us in the gallery today is Mr. Geoff Dubrow from the Canadian Comprehensive Auditing Foundation. He's here today working away from the nation's capital in Ottawa. He's no stranger to the public accounts committees in the provinces across Canada, and he works with the House of Commons as well.

He's here to take in question period and have meetings with various ministries this afternoon. Would the House please make him feel welcome.

G. Gentner: Last week my sister visited the gallery. She was so impressed that she gave a report card to the rest of my family, who have come here on the last day. Would the House please welcome my mother Doreen; my sister Shelley, whose son is playing in the B.C. football championship — they're in Richmond playing against Seaquam from North Delta; and of course, my other sister Leona Warway.

I know that two of the three are definitely New Democrats, and I still have hope that the other one will come across. Will you please give them a good welcome. [1340]

D. Cubberley: My constituency is home to a number of quality high schools, and one of the foremost among those is Reynolds high. Reynolds is well known for its soccer programs, sports programs in general and for band, but it also has a very long tradition of an active interest in civics and governance. In that vein, today in the precincts, perhaps in the gallery, we have 27 grade 11 students, accompanied by their teacher Mr. Todd Hallett.

Will the members please join me in making them welcome.

D. Routley: I'd like the House to help me welcome Kathy and Mark Moore. Mark was the headmaster of Princess Margaret School in my riding and was past president of our chamber of commerce. He's currently working to establish a new chamber visitors info centre. They participated in a fundraiser and actually contributed money to come here, be my guests and have lunch with me. I'm sure that's easy for the other side to imagine as a very prize-worthy endeavour.

I'd like all of us to help make them welcome to the Legislature.

B. Bennett: It's my very great pleasure to introduce the best constituency assistant in the whole province of British Columbia, Courtney Magro from Cranbrook. Welcome, Courtney.

S. Fraser: Ah, last but not least.

I have a large contingent of visitors from Alberni-Qualicum, too many to name, but I'd like to make them all feel welcome. I would like to make one name made available here, because he's visited a number of times, and I've used the same excuse every time. So would the House please help me welcome the contingent from Alberni-Qualicum and Mike Kuriliak.

Introduction and First Reading of Bills

DRINKING WATER PROTECTION AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

M. Sather presented a bill intituled Drinking Water Protection Amendment Act, 2007.

M. Sather: I move introduction of the Drinking Water Protection Amendment Act, 2007.

Motion approved.

M. Sather: British Columbians are becoming increasingly concerned about the health of their drinking water. From concerns about surface water on the Sunshine Coast to concerns in Maple Ridge about groundwater to many other areas of the province, citizens want to know that government and industry are working together to ensure the safety of their water.

However, changes to the Drinking Water Protection Act in 2001 have taken away the authority of the provincial health officer to designate an area for the purpose of developing a drinking water protection plan. This bill amends the Drinking Water Protection Act to give the provincial health officer authority to put in place the development of a drinking water protection plan and to require the affected parties to participate in the process.

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

Bill M235, Drinking Water Protection Amendment Act, 2007, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

PUBLIC INTEREST PROTECTION ACT, 2007

B. Simpson presented a bill intituled Public Interest Protection Act, 2007.

B. Simpson: I move introduction of the Public Interest Protection Act for first reading.

Motion approved.

B. Simpson: This bill will make a single-clause amendment to the Forest Act in order to guarantee the protection of the public interest when a company requests a removal of private lands from tree farm licences.

The bill requires that the public be immediately notified when an application is made to release private lands; that public consultation be conducted with affected communities and workers, including meaningful consultation with affected first nations communities; that a transparent appraisal be done to determine what compensation would be required if the lands were to be released; and that the minister bring forward a recommendation to the Legislative Assembly in response to the release application.

The bill enables the Legislative Assembly to make the determination as to whether private lands will be released from tree farm licences and on what terms.

This bill is needed to restore transparency and accountability to the process of releasing private lands from tree farm licences. Today Pope and Talbot is in court, and the status of their private lands is part of the proceedings. The people of the Kootenays need to know that the fate of their communities and workers

will not be determined by a bankruptcy proceeding. They need us to expedite passage of this bill to give them some peace of mind.

[1345]

Given the urgency of the need to have this bill passed by the Legislature, I ask leave of the House to suspend Standing Order 81 to permit this bill to advance through all three stages this day.

Leave not granted.

Mr. Speaker: Do you want to make the referral motion now?

B. Simpson: I move that this bill be tabled for the next sitting of the House after today.

Bill M236, Public Interest Protection Act, 2007, introduced, read a first time and ordered to be placed on orders of the day for second reading at the next sitting of the House after today.

Statements (Standing Order 25B)

MINING INDUSTRY IN FORT ST. JAMES

J. Rustad: People from different areas of B.C. often look at mining from different perspectives. Sometimes people look unfavourably towards the industry, but more and more people are looking towards mining as an opportunity to build a bright future.

In Fort St. James people look at mining as an economic driver. Fort St. James is known as one of the most forestry-dependent communities in B.C., and for many years it has looked for opportunities to diversify its economy. The Fort has explored tourism and secondary manufacturing, and they have some agriculture, but they haven't been able to build sustaining diversity.

Located along the mineral-rich Quesnel Trough, Fort St. James has the potential to become a hub of mining activity and exploration. Mining can hold the key to diversification for many communities, and Fort St. James is moving towards this opportunity with open arms.

Just north of Fort St. James lies a very promising mineral deposit owned by Terrane Metals. The Mount Milligan project is well defined and was originally permitted in the 1990s. Once the Mount Milligan project commences, it will create a thousand construction jobs and 300 to 400 permanent jobs. Over the proposed 25-year life of the project, the community of Fort St. James will realize significant benefits.

When you consider the challenges the forest industry is facing due to a high Canadian dollar, weak demand from the U.S. housing market and uncertainties surrounding the pine beetle infestation, communities need diversification. Mount Milligan will provide that diversification for Fort St. James, and mining in general will become an increasingly important component for many communities' economic future.

I salute Mayor Rob McDougall and all of his council for leading Fort St. James towards diversifying through mining. I ask all members of the House to join me in promoting mining in B.C. and the tremendous benefits that mining can bring.

ANN ELMORE TRANSITION HOUSE

C. Trevena: I'd like to mark the 20th anniversary of the Ann Elmore Transition House. For two decades it has been serving the women and children of Campbell River and the region.

Named in recognition of Ann Elmore Haig-Brown, who long helped women in need, the transition house has always been accessible 24 hours a day. Violence against women, sadly, happens at all hours, and this refuge for women and children keeps its doors open throughout the year. Almost always full, it started up with just four beds, and twice since then it has expanded the number of beds, spaces for children and common areas. Now there are 20 beds with government funding for 11.

In the 20 years more than 4,000 women and children have been housed and many more supported through groups in counselling which run out of the house. Women can stay with their children for a month. Sadly, that's too short a time for many women in the dire straits that forced them out of the home that they had been living in.

Under the continued strong leadership of Valery Puetz, the executive director, the transition house is now looking at expanding its services again to provide second-stage housing, a place where women and their children can stay longer and start to rebuild their lives.

I think we all have to ask the question why, when there is violence in an intimate relationship, the women and their children leave home — women, who are usually the victim; women, who are usually earning less than their male partner; women, who are responsible for the children. It is inevitably women who flee, and no matter how supportive, how good that temporary shelter is, women are forced from their homes.

Luckily for the women in Campbell River and the area, they have the refuge of Ann Elmore House. The sad point is that they have to seek refuge at all.

[1350]

CPR TRAINING IN SCHOOLS

R. Hawes: Your chances of recovery from a sudden cardiac arrest in British Columbia are between 10 percent and 15 percent. Your chances of recovery from a sudden cardiac arrest in Seattle are about 25 percent. In Seattle 80 percent of the population have CPR training; in British Columbia it's less than 25 percent.

These are figures that were supplied last week by the B.C. paramedics and the ACT Foundation when they were here giving CPR demonstrations, along with a number of students.

The one thing that is indisputable is that if someone suffers a cardiac arrest, the faster that CPR is applied, the better. Time is of the essence. Four to five minutes

produces brain death. Unless CPR is applied, brain damage will occur.

The month of November is CPR Month in British Columbia, and the ACT Foundation, which is the Advanced Coronary Treatment Foundation, and the B.C. paramedics began a program last year in which they are going to schools across British Columbia and teaching CPR training to students in high schools. They have so far reached out to about one-third of the high schools in British Columbia.

I would urge the Minister of Education and the Minister of Health to consider this program as a pre-requisite in the curriculum in high schools. The more people trained in British Columbia for CPR, the safer our population is, and after all, the life that could be saved is your own.

I'd like to congratulate the B.C. paramedics and the ACT Foundation for the work that they're doing. It's all on a volunteer basis, and I urge them to keep going with it. They're making us a safer place to live.

HEALTHY FOOD OPTIONS FOR LOW-INCOME PEOPLE

J. Kwan: Recent years have seen the creation of major public campaigns promoting better nutrition and fitness as a way for all of us to reach and maintain better health. This includes B.C.'s ActNow program.

I don't doubt for one minute that improved diet and exercise are important to our health and for children's healthy development. However, a common misconception is that information and education are the keys to improving food choices. But the reality is that many low-income individuals, especially those living in poverty, cannot afford to eat nutritiously.

A case in point. There are nine days until your next cheque comes in, and you have \$15 to buy food for you and your two boys. Fifteen dollars will buy you a bag of apples, a bag of oranges and some grapes, or a box of macaroni, two pounds of regular beef, a package of wieners and buns, two cans of tomato soup and two loaves of bread. What would you choose?

HungerCount 2007, a report by the Canadian Association of Food Banks, states that over 76,000 individuals in B.C. use food banks and that 36.3 percent of these were children. These figures are greater in some places. The Vancouver Food Bank reports that 39 percent of recipients are children, and the Surrey Food Bank gives a figure of 45 percent being children and babies.

For several years the Dietitians of Canada, B.C. region, and the Community Nutritionists Council of B.C. have researched and published *The Cost Of Eating in B.C.*, which calculates the cost of Health Canada's basic food basket of nutritious food for various family sizes and then looks at the proportion of income this may represent.

The 2007 edition of this report was published yesterday. The report has a list of recommendations that aims to end poverty so that healthy food choices are an option for all. It has been endorsed by an additional 20

organizations. I encourage all members of the House to read this report, and I hope that they could get their support.

CONSTITUENCY ASSISTANTS

B. Bennett: Members regularly get up here during introductions and expound upon the merits of their constituency assistants. I did so just a few minutes ago myself. I want to donate my final two minutes of glory this session to honour my two constituency assistants and also to honour the constituency assistants from all of the constituencies around the province — both sides of the House.

Let's be honest. I think we all know that the constituency assistants do the real work. They get to have those long conversations with Mrs. Jones out there in Jaffray that phones in and says she has a cougar in her backyard, and could they please come out and get rid of it.

[1355]

They get to field those cranky calls in February about the icy roads, and they get to write those hundreds and hundreds of diplomatic and empathetic letters that go out from all of our constituency offices. And of course, in my case, they now also get the opportunity to answer all my e-mails.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

B. Bennett: We all know this is true. Our CAs believe in us personally, and isn't it nice in our business to once in a while feel like we have a few people in our corner?

In my case, Lois Dettling has been with me since my first day on the job in 2001. Lois was born and raised in Cranbrook. She knows absolutely everybody, and she knows who everybody is related to in the community. She tells me whether I'm doing a good job or a bad job, and that's hard to find.

Courtney, who I introduced earlier, was also raised in Cranbrook. Courtney is a 20-something who went away to university, to McGill. She got a great education there and then made a very conscious and deliberate decision to come back to the Kootenay region and plant her roots there, which I commend her for. She is articulate, bright, a self-starter and would make a great MLA. I want to say to the caucus chair: she's not coming to Victoria.

So let us celebrate all of our constituency assistants today. Let's pay them our sincere respect for the work they do for us and for the people of the province.

TREE FARM LICENCE FOREST MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

S. Fraser: In 1956 the hon. Gordon Sloan, the Chief Justice of British Columbia, completed the 800-plus page royal commission report entitled *The Forest Resources of British Columbia*.

In his report Justice Sloan stated that the basic reasons for the award of tree farm licences were, first, stability of employment in dependent communities, and second, establishment of permanent forestry on private lands.

The tree farm licence, or TFL system, was initially designed in the '40s and '50s in response to concerns about the long-term sustainability of B.C.'s forest industry, forest workers and forest communities. Under the TFL forest management system, forest companies contracted to combine their private timberlands with much larger areas of Crown timberlands in a single TFL, the entire area of which was subject to Crown regulation and control.

In return for placing their land under the regulatory framework of a TFL, the licensees gained access to a guaranteed supply of public timber, timber that was intended to support local jobs and to provide forest-dependent communities with certainty over their economic lifeblood.

The private lands were to be managed as if they were public lands. The essential arrangement was designed to ensure perpetual sustainable forestry uses on both Crown and private lands for both economic and environmental reasons.

The TFL social contract was supposed to be permanent, because the consequences of breaking this contract would be too severe for many communities that were built on it.

Justice Sloan had it right some 50 years ago, hon. Speaker. To stray from this most fundamental premise would mean the dismantling of a system rightly adhered to by all governments for decades and would unravel the very basis for B.C.'s forest health and would, no doubt, cause Justice Sloan to roll over in his grave.

Oral Questions

POPE AND TALBOT BANKRUPTCY PROCEEDINGS

C. James: Section 18.3 of Pope and Talbot tree farm licence 23 says: "If the licensee commits an act of bankruptcy, makes general assignment of its creditors or otherwise acknowledges its insolvency, the licensee is deemed to have failed to perform its obligations under this licence." In that case, the minister has the power to remove the licence from Pope and Talbot.

Mr. Speaker, that asset is the only asset that workers, loggers, contractors and communities have access to in order to guarantee they will be paid for their hard work. So my question is to the minister. Will he commit today to remove the licence from Pope and Talbot, under the bankruptcy provision, to ensure that B.C. workers and businesses are treated fairly?

Hon. R. Coleman: This provision has been there a long time, and it's never been used — not when you were in government and at no other time. The reality is this. This matter is before the courts.

[1400]

I have a legal summary from today's proceedings. The advice is to leave it alone, at this point in time, because there are offers on the table that — and I know that you may not like to hear this — may actually end up with two mills being purchased, with the tree farm licence and the jobs continuing to be protected and operating in the Kootenays.

Now, I know you'd rather interfere in the court proceedings and put all those jobs at risk, and that opportunity for those communities. That's fine, if that's the way you wish to look at it. The legal advice I have is that we will proceed through this process, and we will protect the interests of the province of British Columbia with our legal counsel.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Opposition has a supplemental.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Continue.

C. James: The only certainty in British Columbia is that this minister and this government have abandoned communities when it comes to forestry in British Columbia. The minister says....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Member.
Continue.

C. James: The minister says we should let the process continue. Well, communities can't wait.

Today, in reply to a question from the member for Nelson-Creston, the judge overseeing the hearing said that Pope and Talbot is in fact insolvent. Lawyers in the court confirmed that if Pope and Talbot disperse their assets without intervention from the minister, workers and businesses will be last in line and will receive dimes on the dollar.

The only way workers and businesses will be treated fairly is if the minister actually intervenes and takes back TFL 23. So my question is again to the minister. Will he do that on behalf of the communities today?

Hon. R. Coleman: The member opposite might want me to act outside of legal advice, but I have legal advice as to how we should proceed. There's a stay of proceedings in the court. This is in CCAA. The member should know that.

We're trying to reconstruct the company so maybe they can survive and continue to do business in this marketplace.

Now, I'm frankly going to take, at this stage of the game.... I will take the legal advice of my lawyers over the member's advice today.

Mr. Speaker: Leader of the Opposition has a further supplemental.

C. James: Forest-dependent communities have been waiting. They've been waiting and waiting for this minister to say anything — anything that will give them some hope that he understands the crisis that the industry is under.

Yet what do we hear today? We hear the Minister of Finance say that all we can do is be spectators as we watch forest communities collapse. Well, that's not good enough. The Minister of Forests has been a spectator for far too long, and now he must act. He has the power to act under the law.

Workers, families, businesses, contractors — everyone is pleading for help. Today's developments put the ball in the minister's court. If the minister wants to be a spectator and do nothing, then will he just give up the job to someone who will actually care about communities?

Hon. R. Coleman: The only people that don't care about the people in those communities.... It's the member opposite here. You don't care.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. R. Coleman: All you want to do is get in the way of any legal advice that might protect jobs and opportunities. All you want to do is stop people from making investment so they can have modern mills in the future to be able to be in the marketplace. All you're interested in is now trying to give me some politically motivated advice and step into the middle of a court proceeding, as the member opposite....

Just look back to Carrier Lumber and tell me how that worked out for the province of British Columbia. You know, there's an offer on the table, Member. There's actually an offer on the table, before the courts, that could actually have two mills and that TFL operating long-term in that area.

Do you want to throw that out? I don't agree with that approach. I will take the legal advice I have in front of me, and I will proceed in that way.

Mr. Speaker: I'll remind members: through the Chair, please.

B. Simpson: We're not interested in whether or not the minister will take politically motivated advice. We want the minister to show political leadership at this time of crisis in the forest industry and in particular in the Kootenays.

[1405]

What the minister fails to inform this House is that we have a choice. We can allow the court to decide the terms and conditions with which the transfer of that licence occurs, or the minister can use the fact that the judge said that they are insolvent — Pope and Talbot is insolvent — to take back the licence, go out to the communities, and engage the communities and the workers in determining the terms and conditions. That's the difference.

Quite frankly, who cares whether the thing has been exercised or not? The fact is that the minister has been saying he has not exercised that right, because Pope and Talbot was not insolvent.

The judge said today they are insolvent. Will the minister do the right thing and take the tree farm licence back, go out to the communities, and see what the terms and conditions are that they want and make sure they get paid?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. R. Coleman: The purpose of the CCAA is to give some protection to insolvent companies. One of those protections is a stay of proceedings while they try and restructure their business. That's what's going on right now in the courts in British Columbia.

The legal advice today is to let those proceedings proceed because there are some offers coming in with regards to this. You may not like that. But if at the end of the day the one offer is successful, I'd like to see the members from the Kootenays stand up and say: "Gee, isn't that great. That company bought those two sawmills and that TFL, and they're operating and running those jobs in British Columbia."

The opposite is to go in and interfere in the process today, put it in jeopardy, and then lose the two mills and lose all the job opportunities in the Kootenays.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

B. Simpson: Again, the minister fails to understand what we're asking him to do. He persists in being a spectator of what is going on in the forest industry. He hides behind the dollar. He hides behind softwood. He hides behind all the things that he can't do.

The Minister of Finance got it right today. The Minister of Finance got it right today when she said that all this government can do is sit down and be spectators.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

B. Simpson: The point here is that Interfor does not have to walk away. Interfor's offer can still be on the table. The fundamental difference is: who determines the terms and conditions? The communities and the workers who deserve the right to be paid and be heard? Or the court, the judge?

This minister has it at his discretion to make that determination today. Will he do the right thing and take back the licence, go out to the communities and work with Interfor to make sure our communities get the benefits of the public forests that they deserve?

Hon. R. Coleman: The answer is the same. I'm going to take the legal advice that I have in front of me

— that we should allow the stay of proceedings to proceed to see if this company can restructure so that we can protect the jobs in British Columbia.

AUDIT OF TREE FARM LICENCE LAND REMOVALS

S. Fraser: We learned this week, through the committee stage of the Maa-nulth treaty, that the Minister of Forests was negotiating to pay compensation to Western Forest Products over TFL 44 lands, which were going to be removed through the treaty. During these negotiations this minister handed Western Forest Products 28,000 hectares of land. That's pretty tough negotiating on the part of the province.

Will the minister support the call for the Auditor General to expand his investigation of this government's forest giveaways, which include TFL 44 in 2004?

Hon. R. Coleman: The member knows that the Auditor General is an independent officer of the Legislature, and he'll make whatever decisions he wants to make with what he wants to look at.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

S. Fraser: The Minister of Finance's quote that "all we can do is sit down and be spectators" certainly applies to the minister's position here.

[1410]

The minister is willing to bend over backwards to compensate forest giants at public expense but is unwilling to compensate communities that need it the most. Again to the minister: will he support the call for the Auditor General to formally expand his investigations to include TFL 44 giveaways that have ravaged the communities of Port Alberni? Will he look at that as in the interest of the public interests, not the private interests?

Hon. R. Coleman: There's something I should point out to the member opposite about some facts. First of all, the Auditor General is an independent officer of the Legislature.

But there are a couple of facts I'd like him to remember with regards to TFL 44 and Island Timberlands. He always comes out and says these things about all the logs that are being exported out of the country and all of this stuff, so let me give him some facts.

Interjections.

Hon. R. Coleman: No, they don't.

These are some log export numbers for the member. There were 225,873 cubic metres logged by Island Timberlands in 2005, and 17,000 cubic metres got exported. The other thing is that in 2006 there were 77,802, and 9,000 got exported. The reason I say that to the member is because he always wants to take the facts and not remember one other fact in the Alberni Valley.

There is a process going on with SOVA, who are actually meeting with my ministry in the next couple of weeks with regards to a response to a report. But you've got to remember that there's a fluid piece of business in forestry in British Columbia.

Do you know that there are more logs that come into the Alberni Valley from the Queen Charlottes and northern Vancouver Island that are actually taken out of the Alberni Valley?

CLOSING OF CANFOR MILL
IN NEW WESTMINSTER

C. Puchmayr: Well, that last answer was quite shocking. Maybe when the minister is sitting around being a spectator, he should read his files so that he knows what's going on in that industry.

In New Westminster another 130 jobs will be eliminated when the Canfor mill closes as early as next week — 130 direct jobs and many indirect jobs. This represents a significant loss in forestry jobs in my community. This mill produces an environmentally sound product. It produces that product using used pallet boards and waste wood.

Will the Minister of Forests do something to protect this viable, green business in New Westminster and preserve those jobs?

Hon. R. Coleman: I'm aware of the Canfor closure, the west fibreboard plant. I know they tried to sell it for a number of years and had no suitors. I also know they have a company that is trying, frankly, to position itself to be there as a company in British Columbia after this particular downturn in the forest industry is done.

At the same time, on November 11 when I was at Remembrance Day, one of the members from that mill came and asked me if they could meet with me. They met with me the following day. They asked if I could make arrangements for them to sit down with the senior management of Canfor, which has been arranged, and they're trying to work out something together.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

C. Puchmayr: Well, I assure the minister that nothing is being worked out. As a matter of fact, the time lines have gone from January 9 to possibly the seventh of December. So that's what the minister's intervention has done.

The machinery used in this mill is being sold as we speak. It will follow raw logs into the United States. The waste wood that is currently being utilized in this mill will end up in landfills, and it will end up being incinerated.

Again to the minister: does he not think that a value-added mill with such an environmental component deserves the serious attention of this minister and this government?

Hon. R. Coleman: Well, I know the members opposite would like us to go buy every mill in B.C. that

shuts down, continue to operate it, lose money and have the government go broke, because that's what they want the companies to do. The reality is....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. R. Coleman: Get over it. It doesn't. You know what? The member opposite knows this. They just don't want to get to the fundamentals that are facing us today. Our industry is facing tough times because of the dollar, housing starts, sub-prime mortgage rates, and that's where our major market for our products.... I know, the member goes like this because he doesn't want to know.

But you know what? I'm working with the companies. I'm meeting with all of them over the next few weeks. We're going to build together to make sure there's a sustainable forest industry in British Columbia.

[1415]

I know you don't like that, because you'd just as soon force them to lose money and go broke. Then there would be no jobs in British Columbia.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

MEDICAL SERVICES COMMISSION
DECISION ON COPEMAN CLINIC

A. Dix: My question is to the Minister of Health. The Medical Services Commission has made its decision in the Copeman case, and the Minister of Health now apparently believes it's okay to charge a \$3,900 membership fee to see a family doctor.

The minister knows the reasons for the decision, Mr. Copeman knows the reasons for the decision, but the public has been kept in the dark. Will the Minister of Health fully disclose the reasons the Copeman decision was made?

Hon. G. Abbott: The member asks an excellent question. Why would section 49 of the Medicare Protection Act exist, which limits the disclosure?

Well, the reason it exists is that it was passed by the NDP government in 1992. There was no section 49 before 1992. In the 1995 amendments to the Medicare Protection Act that were considered, there was no change to section 49 of the Medicare Protection Act.

I can tell this House, though, that I don't believe section 49 provides an appropriate balance between transparency and privacy. I've asked my staff to look at it. That was a heck of a lot more than that group did for ten years.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Member has a supplemental.

A. Dix: Well, the Minister of Health is correct on this much: the only reason there is a Medicare Protection Act in British Columbia is because the NDP was in government.

He, the Minister of Health, is the first Minister of Health who thinks it's not enough that patients pay taxes and MSP premiums and live in British Columbia — that they have to pay fees to see a family doctor. That's his decision. He's taking no action now.

British Columbians were pretty clear in the Conversation on Health. They said no to more user fees. They said no to more for-profit health care. But the minister doesn't agree with them. So I'm asking the minister. He's making the decision. He said that the Copeman decision is okay with him. He says it's okay in British Columbia to pay \$3,900 to see a family doctor.

Maybe the Minister of Health can tell us this. Why does he believe that, and what is he going to do about it?

Hon. G. Abbott: When I look across the House here, I see one, two — perhaps more — former Ministers of Health of the former NDP government. There may have been more than two. They changed seats fairly quickly back in the latter years. I also look across, and I see....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, just take your seat. Continue.

Hon. G. Abbott: I see the former chief political adviser to the government of the late 1990s, the NDP government. So where was that former chief adviser? Where were the former Health Ministers when the False Creek Surgical Centre opened in March of 1999? Where were these people when the Cambie Surgery Centre opened in April of 1996? Where were they? What I'm also seeing besides former Health Ministers over there is a lot of misplaced hypocrisy and sanctimony from that group.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

[1420]

GOVERNMENT ACTION ON FARMWORKER SAFETY

R. Chouhan: It has been more than eight months since three farmworkers were killed in a terrible accident that might not have happened if the Liberals had acted on recommendations from a coroner's inquest into previous fatal accidents. The RCMP has made recommendations to the Crown, but to date no charges have been laid. We don't have a date for a coroner's inquest.

This fatal accident happened on March 7. This is a very serious matter. People died. My question is to the Deputy Premier. When will charges be laid, and when will we have a coroner's inquest?

Hon. P. Bell: The member refers to an ongoing investigation. I'll take that question on notice.

REORGANIZATION OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT MINISTRY

N. Simons: Three years ago the Gitksan Child and Family Services Society asked the Ministry of Children and Families for resources to address the epidemic of suicide in their communities. They were told that funds would be made available through the northern aboriginal authority.

Three years later the community has yet to receive these funds. Can the minister confirm that the money transferred to the northern aboriginal authority for families sat in a bank account for three years unused, because the authority had not yet been legally established?

Hon. T. Christensen: As I indicated yesterday, we take the issue of aboriginal youth suicide very seriously. There is \$10 million within the child and youth mental health plan that is specific to aboriginal child and youth mental health.

We are working with aboriginal communities in the north as well as across the rest of the province to ensure that, in moving forward, we are working with those communities to identify the strategies that can be put in place to address the tragic situation of aboriginal youth suicide.

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental.

N. Simons: For three years that funding was sitting idle while first nations were crying out for assistance. This is exactly what Ted Hughes worried about. This is exactly what the representative pointed to — mass confusion, chaos and disorganization.

The Minister of Children and Families should answer this question. Will he direct his officials to review the entire aboriginal regionalization process to ensure that the first nations aren't just consulted as contractors but have a leading role, have an essential role in that regionalization process?

Hon. T. Christensen: It's obvious that the member hasn't been paying attention to the aboriginal regionalization process. It has been the most collaborative and open and consultative process ever undertaken in this province with aboriginal people with respect to aboriginal child and family services.

We have established an interim authority on Vancouver Island. We are hopeful that over the course of this next year, it will become a permanent authority. We have an interim authority in the Fraser Valley. We have planning committees in another three regions in the province, all of whom are working with aboriginal communities to ensure that as we move forward, we can do our best to reach consensus around how we can better serve aboriginal children and families.

The members opposite may choose to denigrate that process, but I can tell them all this. We have made more progress in working with aboriginal people around child and family welfare over the course of the last five years than those members did in the complete ten years that they were in government.

SEVERANCE PAY FOR CROWN AGENCY CEO

R. Fleming: The CEO of the Innovation Council of B.C. was terminated last week after only seven months on the job. He will earn almost as much by departing this job as he earned on the job — \$118,000 in severance. This Crown agency originally said they didn't even have to disclose this hefty payout. They were wrong.

Now that the taxpayers know how much the leadership crisis is costing them in the agency, does the minister think that one month's severance for one month's work is appropriate? Can he tell the House: is this the new gold-standard parachute of his ministry and this government for severance?

[1425]

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. M. Coell: I can assure the member that the severance package given was in full compliance with the Public Sector Employers Act. I can also assure the member that in 2002, when we became government, we limited payouts for senior executives. If the member would like a list of the payouts under the NDP, I'd prefer to give it to him.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

The member has a supplemental.

R. Fleming: The minister has clung to this idea that it's compliant with his own internal policies, but part of the question was whether he thinks it's appropriate to get one month's severance for every month worked when you get terminated from your job.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. M. Coell: The member forgets that under the NDP, there were no limits. In 2002 we actually brought in limits for severance for senior executives. I can remember that under the NDP rules, \$700,000, \$300,000, \$400,000....

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.

Hon. M. Coell: That's why we brought in the amendments to limit the amount that would be paid to civil servants.

CHILDREN AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT
MINISTRY CREDIT CARD PURCHASES

G. Gentner: Time after time this session, we have seen this government.... It has misplaced its priorities.

My question is simple, and it's to the Minister of Children and Family Development. What on earth is his explanation for the fact that his ministry spent \$389.84 for escort services last year?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. T. Christensen: Obviously, an expenditure of that nature would be inappropriate. There are audit processes in place to review expenditures on any ministry credit cards.

The member seems fond of raising these types of allegations in this House, as he did last session. I would be very pleased.... If the member wishes to provide the specifics of his allegation to my office, we will determine exactly what has occurred in this case.

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.GOVERNMENT LIQUOR STORE
GIFT CARD EXPIRY DATES

M. Farnworth: We are fast approaching the holiday season, the gift-giving season. If you go to Canadian Tire and give someone — your partner, spouse, whoever — a gift card, it doesn't come with an expiry date. If you go to Bill Vander Zalm's garden centres and give a gift card, it doesn't come with an expiry date. Yet for some reason the province of British Columbia does not extend that same courtesy to the taxpayers of this province.

Can the Solicitor General tell us why, when you go to a B.C. government liquor store and buy someone a gift card, it comes with an expiry date? And when will he end that practice?

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. J. Les: Well, I'm looking forward to getting my gift card from the member opposite, even with the expiry date.

Seriously, Mr. Speaker, this is something that we are moving on in British Columbia. Clearly, the retailers in Canada — and we've been consulting with them over the last several months — are already moving in that direction.

[1430]

[End of question period.]

Tabling Documents

Hon. C. Taylor: Hon. Speaker, I respectfully present the guarantees and indemnities authorized and issued report for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2007, in accordance with the Financial Administration Act, section 72(8).

N. Simons: Hon. Speaker, I seek leave to introduce a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Petitions

N. Simons: I have a petition here from over 1,300 people from the upper Sunshine Coast requesting the government to restore home support services to the levels that existed in the mid-'90s.

I have another petition from approximately 500 people registering their concern about the logging practice in the Chapman watershed by Columbia National Investments.

Mr. Speaker, I'm getting some business out of the way right now. I don't think we're going to be here tomorrow.

I have another petition from a number of residents from the Sunshine Coast urging the government to address the serious problems around the highway, route 101.

Mr. Speaker: Member presents another petition. Have you got any more?

N. Simons: A couple more, sir, yes.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

N. Simons: I beg your indulgence.

Interjections.

N. Simons: I'm being heckled by both sides, Mr. Speaker. Can you do anything about that?

I have another petition today from residents of the Sunshine Coast protesting the use of private managed forest land for development into residential properties.

Mr. Speaker, I seek leave to introduce a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

Interjections.

N. Simons: The members opposite are very adept at deductive reasoning.

This is a petition from over 1,000 residents of the upper Sunshine Coast who are respectfully asking the government to reconsider the meat regulations so that small farmers can continue farm-gate sales.

D. MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I have a petition here — just one petition — signed by people from Vancouver Island and the central interior, asking the province of British Columbia to reactivate the Select Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs in light of the issues arising out of the Tsawwassen and Maa-nulth treaties.

K. Conroy: I, too, have a petition. This is 280 signatures. It brings to a total of over a thousand signatures from concerned citizens asking the Minister of Forests

not to release the private lands from TFL 23 and to engage in public consultation with the affected communities.

K. Whittred: Mr. Speaker, I present a petition from 7,609 residents of North Vancouver and West Vancouver in support of the North Shore Youth Safe House.

C. Puchmayr: I seek leave to present a petition.

Mr. Speaker: Proceed.

C. Puchmayr: I have just learned a tactic in filibustering with petitions.

This petition is from the legion in New Westminster asking to extend the time limit to allow them to continue to use their state-of-the-art smoking room for the old veterans.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I call continued second reading debate of Bill 43, the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Amendment Act.

Second Reading of Bills

GREATER VANCOUVER TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

(continued)

On the amendment *(continued)*.

Mr. Speaker: Minister of Transportation on the hoist motion. Proceed.

Hon. K. Falcon: I rise today to speak to the motion.

Mr. Speaker: Excuse me. Member for Cariboo South.

C. Wyse: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker. I stood to speak.

Mr. Speaker: The Minister of Transportation is speaking on the amendment.

[1435]

Hon. K. Falcon: Mr. Speaker, you know, I have had the pleasure or perhaps, honestly, displeasure of listening to hours and hours of delay tactics and filibustering by the members opposite on Bill 43. It has never made it so clear to me just how out of touch that side is on the needs and the interests of folks in the lower mainland.

It is also, sadly, very apparent to me that the members opposite have not spent sufficient time — if, frankly, any time — on making themselves familiar with the legislation that they have decided to so vehemently oppose. It's actually quite embarrassing. Worse still than that, I think, the opposition has done a disservice to the public by filibustering and attempting to delay this bill for their own political reasons rather than actually utilizing the more than 20 hours of debate

time thus far to get into the details of the bill and provide what — who knows? — could have actually been some constructive input.

It is worth reminding the House that this is a bill that has been on the order paper for seven months. There have been seven days now of over 20 hours of fulsome debate involved in discussing this bill. I was reminded just how vacuous and empty most of that debate has been on the other side when I met with a couple of young UBC students the other day.

These young UBC students had come to talk to me about the bill. I can tell you that the questions they asked, the level of detail and understanding that they knew on that bill was actually far better than anything I'd heard from the opposite side of this House in the 20 hours of debate that has gone on.

Now, having said that, I'd like to take the opportunity to talk about some of the rather interesting things the members opposite had to say while they were commenting on Bill 43 through this motion. There's a lot of material out there, so I'll just try and pull out some of the real interesting ones.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

The Transportation critic, for example, suggested that it was somehow absurd for the public to want to know who their representative is on TransLink. I ask the member: how can one have accountability if you don't know who to hold accountable? That is what is really absurd when you hear those kinds of criticisms.

The opposition has said that Bill 43 is an attack on municipalities. In fact, if you listened to the members — there are some who are quoting Churchill — you would think that the whole essence of democracy is somehow under assault here. In fact, the member for Esquimalt-Metchosin wondered why mayors and councils aren't rising up against this bill.

Where is that tsunami of opposition that the members opposite are praying for, hoping for, believing must be out there? Well, I can tell you why there has not been a rising up. It's because the local government leaders recognize and understand that we have a dysfunctional structure in the current TransLink model set up by that opposition. The only thing that the mayors and councils have risen up against that I've seen publicly is, in fact, their current structure.

I'd like to refresh the memories of the member opposite. I'm glad to see the Transportation critic will be paying attention, I have no doubt, as I go through some of these things. *Vancouver Sun*, March 9, 2006. The individual quoted here is Mayor Derek Corrigan, not exactly a friend of the government — in fact, a prominent, strongly left-wing NDP supporter and member who has been, frankly, the shill for any criticism that the NDP or the members opposite want to make of this government. You can be sure to count on Derek Corrigan being right there.

This morning, from *The Sun*, Corrigan is quoted as saying: "He said he has no confidence in the panel. He said he has always regarded TransLink as a way for the

former NDP government to offload some of its responsibilities on the region." Now, that is one of their friends, if you can believe it.

The Vancouver Sun, June 22, 2004, Larry Campbell, the mayor of Vancouver at the time and TransLink board member. His quote: "Quite frankly, I don't see it working." He's referring to TransLink. "We have to get rid of the parochialism."

[1440]

Vancouver Sun, June 22, 2004, Doug McCallum, at that time the mayor of Surrey, the chair of the TransLink board, somebody who has sat on the board for years. His quote: "We have serious structural problems in governance."

An editorial in *The Vancouver Sun*, June 23, 2004. What does the editorial say? It says: "What we need is a structure that can override the inherent conflict that has paralyzed the current board, which is comprised of local mayors and councillors yet must act in the interests of the entire region." It's an editorial calling for action by the province to fix what is clearly a structural problem.

Another in the *Delta Optimist*, August 10, 2005 — a quote by the mayor of Delta, Lois Jackson, who today is the chair of the GVRD. What did she have to say on August 10, 2005? "I believe we should have every single mayor on the TransLink board, and we don't need five representatives from somewhere like Surrey and Vancouver."

Members of this House, those are actually the people that served on the TransLink board, are involved in local government and have worked with the structure that the members opposite are apparently so intent on defending. This apparently is the grand model of corporate governance and transportation governance that they want to hold up and protect and defend. My goodness, if we think about changing it, we are wrecking the underpinnings of democracy, according to that opposition.

They talk about the assault on municipalities. They've repeatedly suggested that this is somehow doing something bad to municipalities. I have to say that that's a little bit rich coming from those members that were part of a government that actually has a record when it comes to local government.

They have a record that is there for everyone to see, and it is quite contrary to the flowering words we have heard over the last seven months about the importance of local government. I certainly remember how that opposition, when they were in power, in 1996 slashed transfer payments to municipalities by \$113 million and again by \$40 million in 1999. That absolutely poisoned the relationship between local municipal governments and the government of British Columbia.

To put that in perspective, that slashing of transfer payments to local government of \$113 million in 1996 — without any warning, by the way, just announcing it.... What effect did that have? Well, those cuts meant a \$17.2 million funding cut to the city of Vancouver, equalling 60 percent of the Vancouver Public Library budget, equivalent to city funding for all of their community centres and the cost of 180 police officers.

That's the reality of the NDP when they were in government and how they dealt with local governments.

In a letter to the editor the current member for Vancouver-Mount Pleasant — who was the Municipal Affairs Minister in 1999, when the further slashing of \$40 million was made against the local governments, to their detriment — explained the cuts by saying: "Tough fiscal choices would be needed in order to protect health care and education in the current economic downturn."

The problem with that is that the entire decade of NDP government was a current economic downturn. They mastered the art of the "current economic downturn."

Since taking government office in 2001, our government has worked hard to build what I would say very proudly is today a great working relationship with local governments. By working together, we have achieved an awful lot for British Columbians, and I'm going to actually take a moment and remind the members opposite, because they conveniently forget this.

I'll tell you that if you want to see any evidence of that, I just encourage the members opposite, as I know they do, to attend the annual convention of the Union of B.C. Municipalities and look at the standing ovation the Premier of British Columbia gets every year when he stands in front of those local government municipalities.

He gets that because the one thing we don't do is slash \$113 million in transfer payments without notice to local governments, and we don't do it again a few years later with an additional \$40 million of slashing payments to local governments. That's not how you build a great relationship.

[1445]

Let's look at what we do. We've got our B.C. Spirit Squares program — \$20 million.

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: Well, that's interesting. The member for Delta North is yelling out. Maybe it's the rage he feels from sitting on council when the NDP government made those massive cuts.

Deputy Speaker: Minister, you don't refer to people, whether they're in the House or not.

Hon. K. Falcon: You're right, Madam Speaker. You're correct to point that out.

You know, for the members opposite, generally, it could be the rage that they feel having sat there and been victimized by the NDP government as they instituted these harsh, massive cuts in transfers to local government. No doubt that would explain the outbursts that we may hear occasionally from the members opposite.

Let's talk about some of the things that our government has done, and I can tell you it sure doesn't involve making massive slashes to transfer payments to the local governments. We've got our B.C. Spirit Squares program — \$20 million for local governments

to help improve outdoor public meeting or celebration spaces on a 50-50 cost-sharing basis with local government. It's something that was widely applauded by the local governments.

We've got our LocalMotion program — \$40 million over four years to provide bike paths and walkways and pedestrian paths so that we can encourage people to get active and be more involved in the communities, to reduce air pollution, to conserve energy and to create a more active, healthy community.

We've got the Towns for Tomorrow program — a program of \$21 million over three years to communities with a population under 5,000, specifically targeted to those small rural communities that need that kind of assistance. We will provide 80 percent of the cost for infrastructure projects for those small communities.

We've got the Green City Awards. Imagine this: a \$2.5 million program over five years for communities of all sizes. What it's doing is recognizing excellence and leadership in those communities that are helping to build greener, healthier, more sustainable communities.

At the UBCM, just this year, Premier Campbell presented the first-ever Green City Awards to communities that could stand up with pride and accept the awards and the recognition from their colleagues and from their province about the great job they are doing in trying to keep their communities green and our environment healthy.

We've got the traffic fine revenues. Now, remember this. I believe our original commitment when we ran in 2001 was to return half of traffic fine revenues to municipalities. The Premier in fact decided that, no, we're going to return 100 percent of traffic fine revenues to municipalities.

To give you an idea of what that has meant for local municipalities, since 2004 we have transferred an additional \$159.8 million to municipalities for public safety. That is almost \$160 million that municipalities can now utilize to hire more police officers, improve lighting, make the kind of steps that will create a safer society for British Columbians and the communities in which they live. Of course, the NDP voted against that, just as they voted against all these initiatives.

We've got the resort municipality revenue sharing project. To date we've had six resort municipalities that have signed this agreement, which allows them to share a portion of the provincial hotel room tax, so that we can help those resort communities profile and promote their communities and make sure that they've got the opportunity to get the word out about the great communities they have and the resort opportunities in them.

We've got the Canada-British Columbia municipal rural infrastructure fund, and that is a three-way funding partnership between the federal government, provincial government and local governments where we can participate in providing \$220 million in capital projects for B.C. communities. Another example of how we work together with our local communities.

We've got unconditional grants to local government. The Finance Minister provided \$40 million this year alone as part of our continuing commitment to

double our small community grants program by 2009 to a total yearly commitment of \$54 million.

[1450]

We've got the gas tax transfer agreement. We and the Premier and the Finance Minister and ministers of cabinet worked so hard with the federal government to try and get a situation where we could get some of those gas tax revenues — where we could steer them back from Ottawa into local communities and keep them here in British Columbia to help meet their needs.

To put that in perspective, from the year 2005 to 2010 that will represent 635 million new dollars to local governments to help them meet their needs and build projects. That is the kind of arrangement that we have been entering into with local government.

We've got the gas tax transfer agreement, where we help to arrange over \$48.5 million over five years to be earmarked for regional districts — almost 8 percent of the total gas tax transfers.

They talk about how this is an assault on municipalities. That is absolutely shameful — worse than that. We're all used to the kind of rhetoric you hear from the NDP members opposite — completely devoid of the reality that they governed for ten years and the reality of what they actually did to this great province of British Columbia, taking it from the number one economy to dead last, breaking virtually every record in terms of the economic turmoil that they afflicted on British Columbia.

In spite of that record, they still try to spout the rhetoric that they were somehow friends of local government. The evidence is absolutely contrary to everything we've heard for the last seven months.

Now, we talk about our structure, and the opposition stressed repeatedly — and you heard this over and over during the rants against Bill 43 — that there is no need for a professional board. How could this government think for a minute that you ought to have professionals involved in overseeing a large, complex organization making multi-billion-dollar infrastructure decisions?

Well, that's just crazy to the NDP. It's just lunacy to them that we would think about something so outrageous as to suggest that maybe we should have people with a chartered accountancy background or maybe we should think about having some engineers or some finance professionals or people that know a thing or two about managing and operating large organizations. No, we must never go there. That must somehow be an assault on the democratic foundation on which our country was built.

I want to quote what the Transportation critic had to say. Here's what the Transportation critic had to say on this point about professional boards: "Frankly, the chartered accountants — their hands are all over this. The funding formulas here are so complex that they had to have come out of the hands of chartered accountants. If it's not a make-work project for chartered accountants, I don't know what is."

That's the Transportation critic acknowledging that the Transportation critic doesn't understand the financial formulas in the bill. I promise you that I am quoting directly from what the Transportation critic said.

Imagine that. The formulas are just too complex. There must be chartered accountants that have their fingerprints all over this.

Well, I say thank goodness for that. I say thank goodness we've got chartered accountants involved in an organization responsible for billions of taxpayer dollars in British Columbia.

I have news for the NDP members opposite. Large organizations are complex. These are big decisions that are being made. Undertaking the construction of large infrastructure projects is a complex business. Expertise in finance can only make sense in an organization responsible for delivering large infrastructure programs.

If there was ever a group of people that ought to have learned that lesson, it is the NDP members opposite — the ones who were written up in business journals on how not to manage major projects. That was the legacy of the fast ferries. They will live in infamy, because from this point on, business students in Ontario will now look to them as a case study on how not to manage large, complex projects. That was the NDP contribution to the business schools of British Columbia.

The lack of understanding....

[1455]

Interjections.

Hon. K. Falcon: I'm hearing voices. Is there an echo, or am I hearing voices opposite?

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: Thank you. The member raised an issue of the convention centre. I would like to say to the member that the one word that never crossed the Auditor General's pen or mouth was that there was no waste involved in that project. The one thing I have never heard the members opposite say — and we acknowledge.... We wish we had done that project as a private-public partnership.

We on this side wish that we had done it as a private-public partnership. I'll tell you that the only reason we didn't is because we hadn't yet, in government, developed the understanding and knowledge about private-public partnerships. But it is convenient. It is interesting to me that the 19 public-private partnerships underway in British Columbia are being characterized by two things.

Two things they've been characterized by, which the members opposite never talk about: on schedule and on budget, ladies and gentlemen. That is the truth. That is something that the members opposite have yet to acknowledge or recognize.

I continue. The lack of professionals. They are upset because we are going to dare to have a board of professionals to oversee TransLink. That apparently is something that really astounds them.

Talking about the bill, it was interesting to me.... As I sat here and listened to the members opposite go on, it quickly became apparent to me that many of them had not even read the bill.

I know that seems shocking. That seems shocking, but it was readily apparent. It's all over *Hansard* — their statements, which are totally diametrically opposed to what's actually in this bill.

They make reference to the board being hand-picked by the province. This is apparently the great crime that the members opposite see. When they know in fact — they should know if they've read the bill — that the selection of the board rests with the council of mayors. It's the mayors that will actually be choosing who is going to sit on the board. Apparently, they hadn't read the bill.

There is a screening panel, and if they'd read the bill, they would know this. The chair of that screening panel was actually the former NDP Premier of the province, Mike Harcourt — someone I actually have a great amount of respect for.

The former Premier had this to say about the candidates that were being put forward.

Interjections.

Hon. K. Falcon: You might want to listen to this. This is your former leader. He said: "We had a pool of about 250 people to choose from. We had a choice between excellent and superb." That's what the former Premier of the province had to say.

He went on to say that all 15 of the panel's recommended candidates are distributed throughout the Metro Vancouver region to allow for a geographically balanced board and that they include people with experience in transportation, land use, real estate, major construction projects, finance and human resources. Exactly the kind of things, the kind of skill set that you would want to see on a professional board — at least, most British Columbians would want to see, except of course for the members of the NDP.

You know, when I hear them go on about, "How dare we have a board with professionals on it?" I think back to their own record of board appointments. The board that always comes to mind....

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: Thank you. One of my colleagues has reminded me that one of the boards that always comes to mind is the one called Catamaran Ferries International. That was a B.C. Ferries subsidiary board. They appeared to have made a mistake, because initially they put some people on there who knew a thing or two about overseeing large organizations. One of them, of course, was Lucille Johnstone, who had a long distinguished career in the shipping industry.

I remember Kevin Murphy, who was a respected businessman. Michael Goldberg, a university professor, was on there. But there was a problem. There was a problem because this professional board was asking really uncomfortable questions about this project that the NDP had in mind, called the fast ferries.

The board had the temerity to suggest: "Does it really make sense that we go forward with a project

without a business plan? These numbers seem problematic. Have you really done your homework?"

[1500]

So what did the NDP do? Well, the first thing they did, of course, was fire that board. "We can't possibly have a board asking those kinds of unsettling questions." What did they do? They put a new board in place. And who did they make chairman of the board? Well, of course, it's got to be that individual with the kind of background and experience in large complex organizations that the NDP love. The big labour boss Jack Munro — that's who they chose to be the chair of Catamaran Ferries International.

Do you know what Jack Munro said? Do you know what he said after the fast ferries debacle started to unroll? I love this. I'm going to paraphrase roughly what he said. He said, "What the hell do I know about building boats?" — in Jack's inimitable style. It is so classic.

I want British Columbians to know that that's who the NDP wants overseeing large, complex projects. That's what they're fighting for. That's what 20 hours of rhetoric and debate have convinced us of. They want to go back to the good old days of people with no experience, who haven't got a clue about boatbuilding, chairing boards responsible for a major boatbuilding episode.

As I say and as I reminded the members, they did such an amazing job that they have now enshrined themselves in history as a case study for business students trying to figure out how not to undertake major projects. That's the NDP. That's the kind of leadership we saw from the NDP.

If the fiasco of the fast ferries did tell us one thing, it really talked and made it very clear — the Auditor General certainly confirmed that, as did the other two reports — that you've got to have people on the board that understand how to manage and have the expertise to oversee large operations and infrastructure projects.

Then the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith wondered: where were the groups who would challenge the bill? "This was a rallying point." My goodness, sooner or later they should come out of the woodwork, and they should be on the front steps of this Legislature begging us not to go forward with this bill. It was such an atrocity, apparently, on the democratic republic that we know so well.

N. Simons: What republic are you talking about?

Hon. K. Falcon: The truth is, Member....

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Member. Member.

Hon. K. Falcon: I know the member opposite gets excited, and he's well known for his excitement level. I want the member to listen carefully, because he often doesn't. If he listens carefully....

I am always hopeful, because I'm an optimist, that maybe one day the NDP members opposite might actually learn a lesson from the dismal decade that they

inflicted on British Columbia — that somehow, somewhere, at some point it would leach through to them and they might learn something.

Why didn't people respond to the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith, who wanted to know, with his rallying cry, where all the people were behind them? Why is it that the NDP are by themselves with their rallying cry and no one follows? Well, the fact is that the one thing these members opposite have never understood is that, actually, people want to see change.

The people in the lower mainland want something that works for them, that delivers results, that executes on a good transportation strategy. That's what they want, and that's what they're going to get under the new structure that we intend to put in place.

Then they talked about parochialism. This got really interesting for me. The opposition seems to have had a hard time deciding whether the issues of parochialism were even happening in the lower mainland with regard to transit decisions.

There seems to be some confusion. It is not uncommon in the members opposite that there is confusion. I've noticed that there's a lot of confusion on major decisions. They have real difficulty finding what the Leader of the Opposition calls consensus positions.

Consensus positions. They're apparently very elusive for the members opposite. It must be a difficult group to get any kind of consensus with. Nevertheless, their position on whether or not the current TransLink structure is parochial is perhaps another example of this NDP style of consensus decision-making.

The former Transportation critic, my good friend the member for Vancouver-Kensington, said — I'm going to quote directly: "It's really important that we take seriously this notion that TransLink is parochial, because it is absolutely untrue." That was the former Transportation critic denying categorically.... "It is not parochial. How could they say and suggest it's parochial?"

[1505]

But there's a problem. The current Transportation critic, the member for Esquimalt-Metchosin, then got up to explain why TransLink is indeed so parochial. Here's what she said: "What else would a municipality do but represent its own municipality?"

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: The member opposite cheers.

On the one hand, apparently there is no truth to the fact that there is parochialism; on the other hand, the current Transportation critic says: "Of course they have to be parochial. They must be parochial. They're just representing their own community." Guess what.

Here's the problem. The problem is that we've never taken argument with the fact that they're representing their municipality. What we have said is that the regional interest is being sacrificed by that kind of parochialism. We're going to fix that with this bill that gets people thinking regionally.

I don't know where the members opposite were on the issue of Canada line. I've lost track of trying to

figure out where they stand. To the best of my understanding, they still oppose the Canada line. That's the best I can figure out.

It's been years now. They rail against it regularly, so I'm assuming they're probably against it, although I'm not sure if it's a consensus position. I don't know if the Leader of the Opposition is going to come out and actually try and pretend she's definitive, and say she's taken a position. I rather doubt it, but nevertheless the fact of the matter is that transportation is a regional issue. It must be addressed and approached from that perspective.

The current governance structure provides ample evidence that we've had anything but that kind of thinking and that kind of leadership. That's why we're bringing about that kind of change. And then....

G. Gentner: Why do you appoint your representatives to the board?

Hon. K. Falcon: Is there an echo in here? Or is it just that same member, who will go unmentioned, who happens to come from a region in Delta, who is so particularly vociferous.

The new TransLink structure proposed in Bill 43 will provide a balanced approach to decision-making, with all the mayors from the region being involved at the same time, unlike the current structure where you've got — amazingly enough — a system of rotating terms with residents having no clue as to who actually sits there and who apparently is representing their interests on that board.

The creation of a council of mayors in fact increases accountability. What it means is the public knows exactly who they need to go to when they want to talk about the vision and the future of transportation in the region. They can go talk to their mayor. There's no misunderstanding about who they should talk to or who will be held accountable.

The fact of the matter is that there will finally be an opportunity for all of those communities who were excluded from the TransLink board, who were excluded and didn't have that voice, to now sit as part of the council of mayors and have involvement in making decisions in what the future of transit should look like in the lower mainland region.

It is funny. As I sat here listening to the members opposite.... You know, the one thing that I get a real kick out of is so many of the members opposite love to talk about the Minister of Transportation — myself — and they talked about how this minister gave a speech, and he apparently talked about how he likes the Chinese governance system, and oh, they railed against that. This Minister of Transportation, who wants to turn the government into a Chinese style of governance — somehow that's the kind of plot this minister has.

It is so typical of the humourless socialists. They can never, ever even understand when a minister is giving a speech to local government representatives in Harrison Hot Springs and the minister makes a joke at his own expense — which brings down the house, by

the way. And those members opposite, the humourless, negative socialists who can't possibly find humour in anything: "Oh, my goodness. That means that the minister must be serious about this when he talks about comparisons with what happens in China." That is exactly the kind of humourless, negative, destructive, pessimistic kind of approach that we're so used to seeing from the members opposite.

[1510]

Their comments surrounding the Gateway, perhaps, were the highlight of the discussion that I heard around this bill. The member for Esquimalt-Metchosin — remember that this is their Transportation critic, I hasten to add, who demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of what actually goes on in the lower mainland. I actually ask this question in dead earnestness, because when I hear this member talk about the Port Mann Bridge, I don't think this member has even driven across the Port Mann Bridge. I question whether this member actually even understands anything.

She is a member from the Island. The entire time I've ever heard this member talk prior to becoming the critic for the Minister of Transportation, all she talked about was the Island — Island this, Island that — and never talked about the lower mainland. The words "Port Mann" never crossed her lips.

Now, suddenly, she's making comments about Gateway. As I say, I'd sure love to know whether she's actually ever driven over that bridge, because the comments that she made are so hard to believe for anybody who actually lives there, it's unbelievable.

She claims that you could put buses on the Port Mann Bridge tomorrow and the problem would be solved. Unbelievable.

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: You know, I've got the member from a region that otherwise will be known as Delta who is yelling out at me.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Minister, would you sit down just for a second.

Member, you don't have to reach the same stridency in response. Thank you. Just a little order — both members.

Hon. K. Falcon: I appreciate that interjection, because I sat very patiently, and mostly quietly, listening to the members opposite go on about this bill. You know, the member opposite just yelled out: "What about the Pattullo?" Again, I just sadly have to say this. He hasn't done his homework, as usual. It's not a provincial government bridge.

I'm sorry, Member. It's a TransLink bridge, and that's your organization you're defending that you want to stay the same, which hasn't done a thing about it. That is an interesting position for that member to take. That he criticizes the province without even knowing what he's talking about is so typical.

The fact of the matter is that the member for Esquimalt-Metchosin, the Transportation critic, said that you can fix the problem on the Port Mann by adding buses tomorrow. I can tell you, it is an amazing statement to make. It's actually a brave statement to make, to be honest with you, because it shows such a complete disconnect from what actually happens on that bridge. It's a remarkable thing.

The fact of the matter is that everyone in the lower mainland understands one thing: if you tried to add buses to that current bridge, you would achieve nothing. It's an embarrassment and an insult to folks south of the Fraser and north of the Fraser to pretend that that is a solution to the problem of the Port Mann Bridge.

Now, if she doesn't believe the residents who have to suffer the congestion every day, maybe she might believe her former leader who, the other day, was speaking at the Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce. Again, I refer to Mike Harcourt. He had this to say. I hope the member for Vancouver-Kensington is listening, because I know that this will be dear to his heart.

I want to quote directly. "If any of those Commercial Drive, cappuccino-sucking condo dwellers want to know what it's all about, just a drive either way on the Port Mann during rush hour ought to do it."

That's an interesting comment. That actually shows some pretty interesting insight. What, in effect, Mr. Harcourt is saying is that a lot of people who are making these kinds of criticisms, including the Transportation critic, actually don't know what they're talking about because they haven't driven it. They need to actually go and drive that bridge to figure out what the reality is.

If the members opposite could just move beyond that narrow ideology, as the former Premier has, they could show some support and constructive solutions for alleviating the congestion on the Port Mann Bridge, which is approaching 14 hours a day of rush hour congestion. It's absolutely the worst anywhere in the province by a long shot.

As Madam Speaker well knows, we put in place, in cooperation with TransLink, a \$180 million rapid bus system as part of the newly twinned Port Mann Bridge. Not only are we extending HOV lanes all the way out to Langley; not only are we adding \$50 million of cycling across the bridge and across every intersection connecting all the way down to Vancouver to hook up with the local cycling paths; and not only will the new bridge be designed to handle rapid transit in the future, when population growth justifies that kind of investment; not only all of that, but we will also have a \$180 million commitment for rapid bus.

[1515]

Rapid bus means a bus that bypasses the existing queues of traffic and gets people where they need to go quicker, more efficiently — in some cases, more efficiently than rapid transit. It will mean that an individual going from Langley to the Coquitlam SkyTrain station can get there in 23 minutes. That is actually responding to the reality of congestion, not coming forward with ridiculous ideas of just adding buses to the existing situation.

Only someone totally unfamiliar with Surrey and out of touch with the cities south of the Fraser could possibly believe, as that Transportation critic apparently does, that you could put buses back on the bridge tomorrow and fix this problem.

The second suggestion she had — rather amazing — is that we should be tearing up blacktop, as if that is any kind of solution to the transportation dilemma that faces folks south of the Fraser River. She described the Scott Road station as a transit hub. Well, I hate to break it to the Transportation critic, but if she knew Surrey at all, as the members from Surrey would be happy to tell her, the Scott Road station is surrounded by industrial land and a handful of single-family homes.

The transit hub is actually the Central City station. That's where we're seeing the density. That's where we're seeing the ridership that's going to feed the system. It would be helpful if the members opposite did their homework and understood where the transit hub really was in Surrey.

Interjections.

Hon. K. Falcon: The member opposite asks.... I just heard a voice again echoing through the hallway about: when was the last time I was down on Scott Road? Actually, I was on Scott Road last week.

You know, Member, if you actually took the time to drive down to Scott Road, you might turn left on Highway 10, because you'll see part of over \$200 million of road improvements we're doing to Highway 15, Highway 10, Highway 91A. New overpasses — that's the kind of thing you'll see if you take the time to drive down Scott Road.

The Transportation critic then criticizes the Gateway plan by saying that transit isn't part of the plan. Well, apparently they missed the press conference and the front-page news stories that talked about the \$180 million transit plan that was part of the Gateway.

You know, I don't often like to, necessarily, quote too much at liberty from the members of the media that are here with us every day, but I do have to just quote directly from something that a very highly esteemed columnist who writes for *The Vancouver Sun* had to say with regard to the NDP's criticism of the Gateway project, particularly the Transportation critic's comment that transit isn't part of the plan.

I want to quote directly, because I think it actually says it better than I could ever say it, with apologies to the columnist, who probably doesn't necessarily want to be read into the record but will be: "It's like they didn't even look at what the government was actually proposing to do. I mean, say whatever you want in rhetorical terms, but to come out and suggest this is all just about getting cars across the bridge, you haven't even read the basic papers on it."

That's exactly what I am saying. I think, just for once, it would be nice if the opposition NDP members' rhetoric actually matched the facts. I actually don't mind constructive criticism. I think it's actually welcomed, and it would have been nice as part of this

debate had we been able to engage in a debate on the merits of the actual bill.

Sadly, we were forced to listen to filibustering and rhetoric that was, in most cases, divorced from the reality of what was in the bill. That, I think, is a tragedy for British Columbians, who deserved to have the kind of debate and discussion on this bill that I think would have elucidated the facts and would have helped the public understand exactly what was happening in this particular case.

I thought when it came to Gateway.... I actually thought a couple of months ago that the Leader of the Opposition had finally, after two years, taken a position. You know, I was the most excited person in government about this, because I was waiting for them to take a position on the Port Mann Bridge. Finally, the Leader of the Opposition emerged, and she sure sounded decisive about her position. She said: "We are absolutely against that bridge. It's the wrong bridge for the wrong time." She had some little fancy quote around that, and she tried to sound decisive, and there was rejoicing in the streets.

[1520]

Unfortunately, the only rejoicing took place mostly in the streets around maybe the houses of the NDP members opposite, because I can tell you what the public reaction was. It was just a little bit different than perhaps what the NDP thought it might be, and they got roasted. They got roasted. I don't believe I've ever seen the Leader of the Opposition take it on the chin so hard as when she went on *Bill Good* and had caller after caller absolutely vilify her for the position she took.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member. Member.

Hon. K. Falcon: You know, it was interesting, and that position started to soften almost immediately. Suddenly, this very decisive, hard position.... I was getting confused, because I had my colleagues.... The members opposite from Surrey were in their local ethnic media saying: "Oh no, no. That's not what she meant. We actually support the twinning of the bridge. Oh, we're a hundred percent behind it."

I was kind of confused, because I was saying to myself: "Well, wait a minute. I thought I'd just heard the leader take a position." I was actually excited, and I gave her credit. I said, "It's the first time I've heard her take a real, strong position on anything," and I thought that ought to be applauded. But it did not take but a matter of days before that position started to move. Now, actually, I couldn't even tell the public.... I can't honestly tell the public where they are on that bridge anymore.

Maybe they can get up and take another position. I don't know if it will be a consensus position, or if it will just be her position, or they'll all take differing positions, or whatever. It would just be nice to know where they actually stand on that project. But I do know one place where they won't be standing. They will not be

standing on the stage trying to get credit when we open up that new Port Mann Bridge and we open up the new opportunities for folks south of the Fraser.

It is interesting, because as a member I have the great privilege of sitting in this House and listening to so much of the debate not just on my bills but on other bills. I'm always interested in the members opposite, because I actually wish somebody would take the time to put a list together of what they say one day and what they say the other day. It is a remarkable feat of gymnastics. In fact, if it was an Olympic sport, there would be gold medals handed out to every single one of the members opposite. It is really quite something to behold.

I'm just going to give a few examples that I gathered just while I've been sitting in this House listening to the discussion on the environmental bill.

We've got the member for Delta North, who is always one of my favourite members. He's always one to be heard and yelling out hysterical comments. Here's what he said in support of Bill 44. This is on November 21, 2007, so if the members opposite want to check *Hansard*, they'll see it there. The member says: "I stand in support of this Bill 44." That's November 21, 2007. The next day — mind you; only 24 hours has passed — the member says: "This bill is a joke. It is a complete joke." That's an interesting juxtapositioning there, if you ask me.

Another example....

Deputy Speaker: Minister, you're on Bill 43.

Hon. K. Falcon: I am on Bill 43, Madam Chair, and I appreciate you....

What I'm trying to do is recognize that the positions that the opposition are taking on this bill are part of a pattern of opposition that is devoid from the facts and is contrary to statements that they've actually made prior to that. I'm trying to reflect that this is not an isolated case in the case of the amendment on Bill 43, that there is....

An Hon. Member: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

Deputy Speaker: Point of order.

Point of Privilege

G. Gentner: I reserve the right to raise a matter of personal privilege.

Debate Continued

Hon. K. Falcon: Again, on CFAX radio, November 21, 2007, we've got another example where the Leader of the Official Opposition said: "I am certainly pleased that we finally see the Premier doing something on climate change." The next day, amazingly enough, on second reading of that bill, the Leader of the Opposition said: "It's with regret that I stand here today and say that I don't believe that the government is doing enough in the fight against climate change."

I could go on, but the point I'm trying to make here is that this is a problem for the opposition, because their rhetoric is so often divorced from the facts. I guess as members of government, you know, we are held to the facts. If we do not put out the right facts, we will be held accountable, as we should, but the members opposite unfortunately aren't held to that same standard.

[1525]

I think it's unfortunate, because I think it does a disservice to the public when they continually go on and on in a manner that is completely divorced from the reality or the facts or even the bill itself — which, in many cases, they haven't even read and which would give them the guidance and the information that they obviously need.

To be honest, I guess the comments aren't altogether surprising, considering the record that the NDP has on the environment and its dealings with municipalities. You will recall that the other thing they're saying is that this bill is a real assault on municipalities. I talked about the examples of the real, true assault that actually took place in the 1990s on municipalities.

I want to also give another example that the members opposite will conveniently forget. They may recall that during their tenure they did a project called the Millennium line. The first thing the NDP did, of course, is exempt the Millennium line from undergoing the same environmental review process that they required everyone else to go under, because they wanted to fast-track this project for political purposes.

The Environment Ministry was out of the picture. They were driving this project through, and they ignored the environmental regulations and rules that applied to everyone else. That's the actual record of the opposition when they were in government. They went ahead with the Millennium line.

This is the part I find really interesting, because I sat here and listened to the NDP defend the GVRD. They talked about: "My goodness, how important this GVRD is. How could this government have a situation where they appear to be ignoring the interests or the wishes of the GVRD?" Yet I actually had to check the record because I didn't think they could be so blatant in saying something in the House that would be so completely divorced from their own record.

I actually went back and checked, and sadly, I had to come to the conclusion that I was right. In fact, when they went ahead with the Millennium line, they did so against the wishes of the GVRD, this organization which they apparently hold so dear. In fact, as I was doing that research, I looked and saw a quote about the Millennium line from the TransLink president, Pat Jacobsen, who said: "There was never a business case for this line. It was never the region's priority."

Here, ladies and gentlemen, we get right to the crux, right to the very core of the NDP opposition's argument against this bill. They try to suggest that this is a terrible assault on municipalities, that we ignore municipal input, that we don't listen to the GVRD, that this is a terrible assault on municipal input and decision-making. Yet when they were in power, they acted

absolutely opposite to everything we've had to listen to in this House for the last 20 hours of discussion and debate on this bill. That's what we've had to listen to.

It is incredible to me that even though it wasn't the region's priority, even though the GVRD opposed it, they jammed it forward.

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: I hear a voice that sounds similar to the Minister of Environment critic, who amazingly enough is standing there yelling out comments when it was them in government that exempted the Millennium line from environmental rules and regulations. That is embarrassing. That is shameful. That is appalling.

I will say one thing. The environmental process we go through is rigorous, it is long, and it can even be frustrating. But I tell you this: I respect the process. I know how important that process is. I know how important it is that everyone has an opportunity to have input into major projects.

But when they were in power, when the critic for the Minister of Environment was in power, what did they do?

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Order. Order.

Hon. K. Falcon: They exempted a major project from environmental regulation. What a shame.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Minister, just a minute. Minister, sit down, please.

[1530]

Hon. K. Falcon: Madam Chair, I apologize for having to raise my voice, but it's difficult to hear over the shouting, so I will only do that as a last resort. I want to assure the Chair of that.

Again, just to remind the members opposite. The president of TransLink was very clear. There was never a business case for the line. Well, no big surprise there, of course. They never had business cases. But it was never the region's priority. Yet I have had to listen to the most unbelievable diatribes about how we're not listening to the region and how the municipalities are not involved. I mean, it's unbelievable.

What else did people say? Well, I sure like the comments of the ICBA on this issue. Their comments were: "It was a politically driven project with a politically driven timetable." It goes on to say that what it shows is that the NDP government really doesn't have any clue of how proper, ethical business practices are undertaken. That was just another in the many, many comments that were made.

Interjections.

Hon. K. Falcon: Oh, and I keep hearing the voices opposite.

How, when the truth gets put onto the record, it creates some sensitivities. How it creates some sensitivities with the members opposite. I get that. I know how difficult it can be, but I'm going to make you weather it just the way I stoically and patiently and kindly weathered the diatribes that I heard for over 20 hours on this bill.

They're going to have to listen to the facts, because I will say this. This is a minister and a government that will put the facts on the table. We will be held accountable for putting the facts on the table, unlike the flights of fancy that I hear from the members opposite.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member.

Hon. K. Falcon: Time after time the members opposite have shown themselves to be totally unfamiliar with the communities that they purport to defend and, evidently, completely unfamiliar with the legislation itself. I'm going to refresh their memories and reiterate why moving forward with Bill 43 is actually very, very important and why it is something that is being embraced and welcomed by the public in the lower mainland.

At the end of the day, I do know one thing. The public wants results. They actually want government that's going to deliver results. Results for the members opposite may be process and arguing and debating and fighting and getting nowhere. But to the public, the result is that when they have a bus come by on Broadway, they actually can get on that bus and get to their destination. That's the kind of result the public wants.

When the members opposite talk about: "Oh, we're concerned about security at stations...." For ten years apparently that security didn't amount to anything. We get in power, and we're going to make sure there are turnstiles and gated entrances to rapid transit stations so that people can actually feel safe at a rapid transit station. That's what we're going to do. That's the difference between that government and ourselves.

Let me talk about Bill 43 and why....

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: That's right. The Minister of Energy and Mines reminds me that a trip was made by the member opposite, at that time....

Hon. L. Reid: Vancouver–Mount Pleasant.

Hon. K. Falcon: The member for Vancouver–Mount Pleasant — thank you — went with, I believe, nine bureaucrats to London to examine the system of turnstiles and see whether this made some sense. My recollection.... This is going back many years, but I know that trip cost well over \$50,000.

They came back, and what happened? Well, what usually happened. Absolutely nothing. Nothing addressed the legitimate security needs that women have when they're at that station, particularly at night. Nothing moved forward that would actually address

this issue that is so important to the public, which they constantly go on about and pretend they care about.

The fact of the matter is that we're dealing with it. We're going to get those gated systems up. We're going to make sure people feel safe. We're going to protect the public of the lower mainland of British Columbia.

Let's take an opportunity to talk about the bill. I think this is an important bill that gets to the core of how we're going to strike the balance between delivering a transportation system that works for the public.... These major projects and decisions help get put together by people who have the background, the knowledge, the experience — whether it's in accountancy or finance or human resources or engineering or what have you — that will be there overseeing major projects, overseeing what is, after all, a billion-dollar annual operating budget and have to make decisions that, frankly, will last for generations in the lower mainland.

I can tell you one thing that I used to hear all the time, and not just from the current board members. I quoted into the record what the existing and past members of the TransLink board had to say about the structure, and none of it was particularly flattering.

I will say this too. I've spoken at great length with many of the current members of the board, including the chair, Malcolm Brodie, who I think has done an exceptional job trying to work with a very difficult structure on how to actually move transit decisions forward and trying to deal with the challenges of a growing lower mainland and a transit system, frankly, that has not kept up with the needs of the folks in the lower mainland.

The one thing that always came up — the one thing that was so apparent to the public and why the public is happy to see this change come about — is that it was so clear that we had a governance structure problem. It's not that there weren't good people who sat on the board, because there were. It's the fact that you had a structure in place that absolutely guaranteed that what you would get is parochialism and in-fighting, and that regional interests — the larger, broader public interests of the transportation needs of the region — would be lost. That's exactly what was demonstrated since the NDP put that unbelievably byzantine structure into place.

[1535]

As you know, we've got a situation now where you've got less than half of the municipalities....

An Hon. Member: Fewer. Fewer than half.

Hon. K. Falcon: Fewer than half of the municipalities in TransLink's service region are actually represented on TransLink's board at any time.

I ask you: how on earth does that give them representation? Half of them aren't even represented on the board. Yet not once did I hear any member of that opposition talk about that. Not once did I hear them talk about the travesty that it was that less than half of the members' municipalities were represented on the TransLink board. I never heard a word about that from the members opposite.

Oh no. They had to defend this byzantine, bizarre structure that they set up at all costs, in spite of all the evidence. They had to defend it and pretend that any attempt to tamper with the TransLink governance structure was in fact tampering with democracy itself. That's what we heard from the members opposite. Remember that.

Yet not even once did I hear them talk about the fact that less than half of the municipalities in the region are actually represented on the board. How do you think those municipalities feel about that? How do you think they feel?

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: The member from Langley-Aldergrove yelled out: "Awful." He's right to say awful. I can tell you that when I meet with mayors of Langley, they sure don't feel like they're getting a good deal out of the regional transit system that the NDP put in place. When I talk to the mayor of Surrey — and she said it publicly — she sure doesn't feel like she's getting a good deal out of the transit system that they continue to defend.

When you talk to almost anybody in the public, they will tell you that they don't feel that they're getting the right service, the right level of service, the right decisions being made or that the interests of the region are being looked after. They don't tell me that.

Only those members opposite in their usual negative, destructive, pessimistic way will just cling, as if their very lives depended on it, to a structure that virtually nobody else will defend. But they will. And any change to that must be the end of democracy as we know it, according to the members opposite.

Let's look at the structure. It is a rather fascinating structure. It's a structure only a socialist could put together, because nobody can figure it out.

They talk about accountability, so you're going to love this whole vision of accountability that I'm about to put in front of you, which is the current structure. Members get elected to their various councils around the lower mainland. Then from their councils they get appointed to a board called the GVRD. Then from the GVRD board, people get appointed onto this other board called TransLink.

Once they sit on that TransLink board — here's the best part, because less than half of the municipalities are even represented on this board — they just revolve them every year. That's a good way to develop constructive oversight of a billion-dollar operation with multi-billion-dollar commitments.

That is the kind of structure that the opposition fights to preserve. In fact, the very democratic system that we apparently have in place is at risk if we move away from this paradigm of democracy, this paradigm of accountability.

When you walk around the lower mainland, as I do, and ask people, "Could you please name me one person that sits on what is known as TransLink?" they can rarely name a single person who sits on that board.

How in any universe, except the one that they live in, could that make any sense to anybody but the NDP?

One-year board terms, as is currently provided for — I have to remind the members — are hardly conducive to the kind of long-term planning and decision-making and oversight you want to see on a large, complex organization like TransLink.

You know, I remember, as we were going through the debate over the Canada line, the province and the Premier were insisting that that project must be built and constructed as a private-public partnership. We insisted on that.

TransLink, especially the left-wing members that are allies of the NDP opposite, were beside themselves. "How dare they demand it be a P3? We want to build this ourselves. We can do it better." Imagine that. People like David Cadman and Derek Corrigan would be overseeing a \$2 billion complex infrastructure project. That's what the allies of the NDP wanted to see.

No. We insisted it was going to be developed as a private-public partnership. If we were going to put \$435 million of provincial taxpayer dollars into that project, it was going to be a P3.

[1540]

The federal government agreed with us, and guess what. Today it is being built as a P3 on schedule, on budget. It'll be delivered for the benefit of the lower mainland residents.

Yet the lengths to which they will go to say just completely crazy things devoid of any reality never ceases to amaze me. The member from Maple Ridge stood up the other day. He was talking about a TransLink project. It happens to be a P3. The Golden Ears bridge is a project which, by the way, is proceeding very well on schedule and on budget. The member stands up and says — listen to this — that it was \$600 million over budget.

What? Like, where does this come from? Can you imagine if I could just stand up and make up numbers and throw them out there? I just sit here, and I am amazed that they can say this kind of stuff.

I happened to be in the House at that time, and I said: "Are you kidding me? Where do you get a number like that?" It's like a deer in the headlights, you know. He was looking at me: "Well, it is."

Hon. R. Neufeld: "Sounded good to me," he said.

Hon. K. Falcon: Yeah, it sounded good to him.

I plead with the opposition: let's have debate, but let's at least have a factual basis to the opposition critics. It would be so beautiful to the public of B.C. if they could hear them utilize real facts.

What else? Well, we've got a board that, as you know, is a challenge because decision-making often falls victim to parochialism. I'll take the critic for Transportation.... I'll take her comments quite as she put them. She thinks: "Yes, that's exactly right. That's what they should be doing. They should be fighting for the municipality."

The problem is that we're not talking about their municipality. We're actually talking about the region. We're talking about a transit system that will work for the region. That is what was absent. That was what we did not see, and that is what we are going to fix as part of the new structure.

You will now have a professional board — a board made up of professionals that come from a background of finance, human resources, engineering, legal and the kinds of skill sets that you would want overseeing the complex decisions around procurement, around overseeing very large, complex and in some cases multi-billion-dollar projects. That's the kind of professionalism you want.

Then you will have a council of mayors made up of all the mayors in the region — not some of them, not less than half of them. All of them will be part of the council of mayors. What they will do is set the vision and the direction. They will be saying: "Here's what we want the transportation system to look like over the next ten and 20 and 30 years in the region."

[1545]

That's what they do best. That is what they will do best. They will have input into the construction and building of those visions. They will work with the professional board. They will meet with the professional board at a minimum of four times a year. That is a minimum.

The members opposite talked about that like it was a cap. "How outrageous," they said, "that they would only meet with the professional board four times. This is an outrage." No, Members. You hadn't, again, read the legislation. It is a minimum of four times, and the council of mayors will work with these professionals.

I guarantee you this. I, in fact, know this. I know because I know all of those mayors. I work with all of those mayors on a regular basis, and that's why they're working with us to make this work. I know that they're going to do a fantastic job. They're going to work with that professional board, and they will deliver a transportation system we can be proud of in the lower mainland of British Columbia.

Then we have the poor public under the current structure. They don't know who their representatives are. The representatives are changing all the time. They're seeing the infighting and the warring going back and forth. They're not seeing anything actually happen that would provide them benefits. Or, when it does happen, like the Canada line, it's only after a long-drawn-out, internationally embarrassing circus that went on for far, far too long.

They say to themselves: "Who are the ultimate decision-makers?" The structure that the NDP put in place is so complex that the GVRD and the TransLink board are often diametrically opposed on the kinds of issues they're supposedly working together on. We've seen them be on the opposite sides of some key transportation issues — like Gateway, for example, or the priority of whether it should be Canada line or the Evergreen line.

R. Hawes: Oh, say it's not so.

Hon. K. Falcon: Absolutely. This is exactly the kind of thing that has gone on for too long. Apparently, our fault is that we actually said: "You know what? We're going to fix it." We're not going to pretend that there's not a problem here. We're not going to pretend that there's not a better way of actually dealing with transportation issues than what we've had go on the last number of years in the lower mainland. We're actually going to put into place a process that will work and will actually deliver results for the public. That's really what the public wants to see.

The members opposite.... Bless them, because they do give me joy when I am speaking on issues like this. They actually give me more than joy. They give me so much material on the things they say in this House that I can then read into the record and hold up to the bright light of accountability and show how it is completely at variance with things called facts. That's what they always have difficulty with.

This structure called TransLink, which they are fighting so hard to defend, was an interesting thing. They set up a ten-year plan, but they didn't actually fund the plan. They were pretty good at saying: "Here's the kind of things that we want to build and add and get done and do to the transit system and get all this stuff put in place." But they didn't identify what sources of revenues were going to be necessary to pay for them. So we had a situation where, starting in 2009, they would be running significant deficits. By a couple of years later the organization would effectively be bankrupt if they just proceeded with the existing plan.

I actually don't think, as a Minister of Transportation responsible for transportation across the entire province of British Columbia, that it is a structure that not only is not giving the public any confidence. It certainly is not inspiring the Minister of Transportation with confidence that this is the right model for going forward when our Premier and our Finance Minister and our government actually want to deliver some big changes in transportation.

We want to see exciting things happen. We want to meet our 33-percent greenhouse gas reduction target. We want to make sure TransLink is working with us and that they have the right skill set, the right governance structures, so they can execute a transit plan that is going to work for the lower mainland of British Columbia.

Madam Speaker, we find ourselves here on the last day of our session where, sadly, we have not had the opportunity to engage in a real debate of the bill on a clause-by-clause basis, because we have an opposition that has had this bill in front of them for the last seven months. This bill has been on the order paper.

Interjection.

[1550]

Hon. K. Falcon: They apparently are slow readers. So says one of my colleagues, and I would agree with that.

I would have to say that it is unfortunate. I actually think that the members of the opposition have really

done a disservice to British Columbians. For the last 20-plus hours over seven days on a bill that's been on the order paper for seven months, when we could have had the opportunity to have substantive debate on this bill....

I might remind the members opposite that I had a better debate with a couple of UBC students about the merits of the bill than I heard from across that aisle for the entire 20-plus hours that they've been filibustering this bill. That, I think, is really a shame. I actually told the UBC students that. I congratulated them. I said: "You know what? You've actually done more homework. At least you've read the bill."

It's remarkable. We had people standing up talking about the bill who didn't have a clue what they were apparently talking about. They hadn't actually read the bill. It was just absolutely remarkable.

Madam Speaker, we as a government have in this House — and I'm pleased to say, with the support, finally, ultimately of the members opposite — passed a bill, which actually sets in legislation for the first time that I'm aware of in this country hard targets that government must meet in terms of showing our leadership and doing our bit for the reduction of greenhouse gases in the province of British Columbia. We do that, and we undertake those steps, because we are absolutely serious about showing that kind of leadership.

In the other areas that we have moved towards, transportation is going to be a big part of that. We cannot achieve those targets without transportation playing a big role. Forty percent of all the greenhouse gases in British Columbia are derived from transportation sources. Of that 40 percent — I'll do the math for you — 16 percent is from automobiles and vehicles.

Therefore, it is important that we deal with these issues. Today, when I announced a new regulatory change to allow electric vehicles to operate on the roads, was one important step towards helping us meet our goal.

When we announced \$50 million for new, clean, energy-efficient buses that will be in every part of this province, expanding transit service, it was another part of helping us meet that goal.

When we undertake our cycling programs or our \$40 million LocalMotion program — to cost-share with local governments the expansion of pedestrian paths and cycling paths — it is about helping us meet that 33-percent reduction target.

When we talk about a rapid bus service — a \$180 million commitment — going across the Port Mann Bridge to give people the option, for the first time ever, to have effective bus service across that corridor, it's about helping us meet our challenges.

These are the kind of steps that we are going to take and will continue to take. At the end of the day, the one thing the public — and the public that is taking time to view this discussion today — needs to know is that this Premier and this government are dead serious about making sure that we meet and indeed exceed the targets that we put into legislation here in British Columbia.

The members opposite are what I call the status quo folks. The status quo folks are the people that don't want to see any change. Any change is threatening to them. They didn't want to see any change in the '90s, and what we got was the worst economy in the country. Today we've got the strongest economy in the country.

Today, instead of running deficits every year like they did under the NDP, we've got surplus budgets. We've got a triple-A credit rating again in British Columbia. We have built that on the foundation of solid economic underpinnings, making sure that we reduce our red tape by over 30 percent and that we cut taxes for individuals and corporations to make sure that we've got a competitive climate.

Because of that, we now have the most important thing that a government needs to carry out its wishes, because rhetoric isn't enough. It is not enough to say, "We would like to do all the stuff," but not have the means to do it. We have the means to do it because we have a government that is financially responsible and now has the resources to invest in transportation initiatives — to invest so that we can actually bring about the results that the public wants. That's exactly what we're going to do.

[1555]

Interjection.

Hon. K. Falcon: The members opposite... You know, they will yell. I know, when they hear those kinds of facts, how painful it must be. I'm just reading into the record what the facts were. All of this can be verified. I encourage the folks listening in the audience to actually look this up.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member.

Hon. K. Falcon: The member opposite, again....

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Order. Member. Member.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member.

Hon. K. Falcon: The members opposite, I realize, find that difficult to hear. But the fact of the matter is that for any government — our government, any government — to deliver the kind of aggressive, good-news stuff that we've seen across this province.... The announcements we've seen on a new William Bennett bridge, on the Kicking Horse Canyon, on the \$2 billion Canada line, which is going to take 100,000 people a day out of their cars and into public transit....

All of that is only because we have an economy that is working in British Columbia. We have a triple-A credit rating — the only government outside of Alberta and the federal government that actually has a triple-A credit rating.

The members opposite wouldn't know that, of course. During their decade they took us from triple A and got us successively downgraded year after year after dismal, dreadful year until finally we got a free enterprise government elected, and we got things back on track. We got a balanced budget, we got a triple-A credit rating, and now we're reinvesting in British Columbia.

Deputy Speaker: Minister, you're on Bill 43.

Hon. K. Falcon: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

Madam Speaker, it goes right to the core of this bill, because transportation is how we are going to meet the targets that we've set. But for us to meet the targets, for us to meet a 33-percent greenhouse gas reduction, we have to have a transit system that works for people.

I get that the members opposite know about everything but results, but I'll tell you that this is a Premier and a government that are driven by results. We want to see results. Under this bill and the changes we are making to the TransLink structure, we will get the kinds of results that we need to see in British Columbia, for the lower mainland of British Columbia.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Interjections.

Hon. K. Falcon: I hear the members opposite. Now they're whining about the fact that there is time allocation, in spite of the 20-plus hours they wasted when they filibustered and wasted time, when we could have been bringing forward a good, sensible, wholesome, fulsome debate on this bill. They reneged on that responsibility. They reneged on the responsibility that they have to British Columbians to step forward and have a debate about the merits of the bill and get into the details of the bill. They avoided that responsibility.

Today I can tell you that we now have a bill. We now have an opportunity to radically restructure how we are going to deliver great transportation services for the lower mainland of British Columbia. We are going to make sure they've got the resources they need, that they've got the professional acumen they want, and that the mayors will be able to work to deliver the services the public needs and the public demands.

I will say this. Bill 43 is going to be one of those tools. It's not the only tool. It will be one of those tools that we will utilize to ensure that the public — yes, the public; the public that are asking for results....

Some Hon. Members: More.

Hon. K. Falcon: Oh, there's more. There's more. I can assure you there's more.

The public is pleading with government to actually deliver results. I will say this. Today in Vancouver and Richmond there would not be a Canada line if that opposition had anything to do with it. There would not be a Canada line. There would not be the kind of rapid transit expansion we're seeing.

This government and this Premier are not only going to make sure we get that Canada line built, as they are, but we're going to build the Evergreen line with our local government partners. We are going to deliver a transit system and a transportation system that works for the people of British Columbia.

Sadly, I find myself at the end of my time allocation. I thank the Speaker...

Interjections.

Mr. Speaker: Members.
Minister, please take your seat.

Hon. K. Falcon: ...and the Members of the Legislative Assembly for their support.

Mr. Speaker: Members, pursuant to the previous motion of this House, the first question is on the reasoned amendment.

Amendment negatived.

[1600]

Second reading of Bill 43 approved on the following division:

YEAS — 36

Falcon	Reid	Coell
Chong	Christensen	Les
Richmond	Bell	Krueger
Roddick	Hayer	Jarvis
Whittred	Cantelon	Hagen
de Jong	Taylor	Bond
Hansen	Abbott	Penner
Neufeld	Coleman	Hogg
Sultan	Bennett	Lekstrom
Mayencourt	Polak	Hawes
Yap	Bloy	MacKay
Black	McIntyre	Rustad

NAYS — 28

S. Simpson	Fleming	Farnworth
James	Kwan	Ralston
B. Simpson	Cubberley	Hammell
Coons	Thorne	Simons
Puchmayr	Gentner	Routley
Fraser	Horgan	Lali
Dix	Trevena	Bains
Robertson	Karagianis	Krog
Chouhan	Wyse	Macdonald
	Conroy	

[1605]

Hon. K. Falcon: I move that the bill be referred to a Committee of the Whole House forthwith.

Bill 43, Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Amendment Act, 2007, read a second time and ordered to proceed to a Committee of the Whole House for consideration forthwith.

Committee of the Whole House

GREATER VANCOUVER TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

The House in Committee of the Whole (Section B) on Bill 43; K. Whittred in the chair.

The committee met at 4:09 p.m.

Sections 1 to 102 inclusive approved.

Title approved on division.

[1610]

Hon. K. Falcon: I move the committee rise, report the bill complete without amendment.

Motion approved on division.

The committee rose at 4:11 p.m.

The House resumed; Mr. Speaker in the chair.

Report and Third Reading of Bills

GREATER VANCOUVER TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY AMENDMENT ACT, 2007

Bill 43, Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Amendment Act, 2007, reported complete without amendment, read a third time on division and passed.

Hon. M. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I believe the Lieutenant-Governor is in the precincts and move that the House recess, pending his arrival.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we'll wait for the arrival of the Lieutenant-Governor, and we'll ring the bells when he arrives.

The House recessed from 4:12 p.m. to 4:35 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please take your seats.

Royal Assent to Bills

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor entered the chamber and took his seat on the throne.

Clerk of the House:
Maa-nulth First Nations Final Agreement Act

First Nations Education Act
Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority Amend-
ment Act, 2007

Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Act
In Her Majesty's name, His Honour the Lieutenant-
Governor doth assent to these acts.

His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor retired from
the chamber.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Solicitor General
has an announcement to make.

Introductions by Members

Hon. J. Les: If the House will indulge me, I have an
introduction to make. That would be my latest grand-
son, who was born this afternoon. His name is Nicholas
Ryan Kooyman. He's the first son, first baby, for my
daughter Sharon and her husband Ron Kooyman.

He clocked in at nine pounds and five ounces. So
it's a great head start for a new constituent for my col-
league from Chilliwack-Kent.

[1640]

Mr. Speaker: It's something about the smiles on us
grandfathers' faces when this happens, you know.

Hon. Members, before we go to the Government
House Leader, I want to tell everybody to have a safe
trip home, a safe journey. Prior to Christmas there are a
lot of functions that people have to go to and a lot of
things that people have to do. There's probably a lot
more work, once we get back into our constituencies,
that will take place for members.

I want to wish everybody a merry Christmas. Make
sure that over the Christmas season you spend time
with your families, as I will do with my family — and
my new granddaughter, of course.

Again, I want to thank everybody. I think we had a
reasonably good session. I think that by and large, even
through as many question periods as we have done, we
are still holding our heads high amongst the Members
of Parliament throughout Canada, and we should still
be proud of the way we've acted.

Hon. M. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I move that the
House at its rising do stand adjourned until it appears
to the satisfaction of the Speaker, after consultation
with the government, that the public interest requires
that the House shall meet or until the Speaker may
be advised by the government that it is desired to

prorogue the third session of the 38th parliament of the
province of British Columbia. The Speaker may give
notice that he is so satisfied or has been so advised, and
thereupon the House shall meet at the time stated in
such notice and, as the case may be, may transact its
business as if it has been duly adjourned to that time
and date. And in the event of the Speaker being unable
to act owing to illness or other cause, the Deputy Speaker
shall act in his stead for the purpose of this order.

Mr. Speaker, with thanks to all members for their
participation in the session.... Best wishes. Last time I
did not accede to my colleague the Opposition House
Leader. So with the House's permission, I shall do so now.

M. Farnworth: I just wanted to echo the House
Leader before he adjourned and from this side of the
House wish everyone a safe and happy journey. To our
colleague Sindi Hawkins, whom I know we are watching;
we wish you all the best in the coming months, and we
want to see you back in this chamber.

Hon. M. de Jong: I know that the member Sindi
Hawkins will appreciate those words and will be sus-
tained by the strength of the support she has received
from all members in this chamber.

Best wishes to all members for a safe and enjoyable
holiday and for safe travels wherever you go. Perhaps
it's appropriate at the end of this session to thank the
members and the staff, who work diligently — Joyce
advises me that everyone has been very diligent about
cleaning out their desks — and all of the support people
that help make this place function, whether it is in the
dining room, in the library or in Hansard. To the myriad
of officials who go unnamed but who we rely upon in
our offices and in and around these precincts, our
thanks and our best wishes.

Maybe we can end this session by saying thank you
— *klecko klecko, h'chu, haitchka, Merry Christmas, Feliz
Navidad, Joyeux Noël, à la prochaine fois.*

Hon. M. de Jong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on behalf of all mem-
bers, we do want to thank all the staff who have done
such an admirable job for this fall session. Best wishes
and Merry Christmas to all of them, as the Government
House Leader said.

This House stands adjourned in accordance with
the motion.

The House adjourned at 4:44 p.m.

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