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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

FOURTH SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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CONTENTS

Thursday, February 12, 2009
Morning Sitting

Routine Proceedings

| | Page |
|--|-------------|
| Standing Order 81.1 | 13673 |
| Adoption of government business schedule | |
| Hon. M. de Jong | |
| Second Reading of Bills | 13673 |
| Finance Statutes (Deficit Authorization and Debt Elimination) Amendment Act, 2009 (Bill 48) <i>(continued)</i> | |
| R. Thorpe | |
| C. Wyse | |
| Hon. M. Polak | |
| D. Routley | |
| C. Evans | |
| Hon. K. Krueger | |

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2009

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

Standing Order 81.1

ADOPTION OF GOVERNMENT BUSINESS SCHEDULE

Hon. M. de Jong: I rise pursuant to Standing Order 81.1 and happily can advise the House that the government and opposition have come to an agreement pursuant to Standing Order 81.1(1) with respect to the completion of Bill 48, the Finance Statutes (Deficit Authorization and Debt Elimination) Amendment Act, 2009, which pursuant to that agreement will complete all remaining stages by the end of the regular sitting time today, Thursday, February 12.

Orders of the Day

Hon. M. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I call continued second reading debate on Bill 48.

Second Reading of Bills

FINANCE STATUTES (DEFICIT AUTHORIZATION AND DEBT ELIMINATION) AMENDMENT ACT, 2009 (continued)

R. Thorpe: I'm pleased to be able to continue on today. Where we left off yesterday was: who's for what, where are we going and how is it important to make sure that we're focused on financial discipline, economic opportunity and the creation of jobs?

On this side of the House, we believe that international trade and trade within our country is an important thing so that communities can survive, jobs can be created and economic activity can take place in British Columbia. That's what we stand for on this side of the House.

On that side of the House, I can only assume that the member for Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows speaks for the opposition when he says: "Yes, I oppose TILMA." He's against trade. He's against labour being able to move from place to place to create opportunities for individuals, for economic opportunities.

[1005]

We also see that the Leader of the Opposition is opposed to economic opportunity in rural British Columbia, jobs in rural British Columbia, because she says: "We're saying, 'Let's stop the process of IPPs until we have had a full, independent investigation.'"

What the NDP is saying is that they're against first nations having the same economic opportunities as the rest of British Columbians. They're against rural British Columbia having the opportunity for economic development, and most importantly, they're against jobs for first nations. They're against jobs for rural British Columbia.

This side of the House supports jobs in rural British Columbia. We support jobs for the first nations of British Columbia. That's what we support.

Interjection.

R. Thorpe: You know, when we hear some shallow voices from the other side....

I think it's best said by a member of this House who both sides of this House have come to appreciate over the years, because that member has always told it the way it is. I'd like to quote the member for Nelson–Creston: "We made announcements about things we weren't even going to do." That says it all.

The NDP will say whatever they have to say in the moment, sometimes before they have caucus meetings, sometimes before they have caucus consensus, and it depends if Sinclair from the Federation of Labour has called them. They just say whatever they have to say to try to get through to score cheap political points.

We hear all the rhetoric today about Bill 48. We've heard it for the last few days. I'm betting they're going to vote for it. I'm betting that, because some of them have had the courage to say so. We haven't heard it from some other members, though.

They've also said that in releasing their platform, they are going to present a fully costed platform after the February budget. That's from the member for Surrey–Whalley. Now, will that be a day after, a week after? Or will it be after the election? They just say "after February."

But if they're for the transparency they say they are, I challenge them to table it within a week after our budget is tabled in this House and we show British Columbians how we're going to care for their health care, how we're going to care for their education and also have a prudent financial plan to get us through these very challenging and difficult global times. I challenge them.

Bill 48 is about tabling a budget in compliance with the law, unlike the NDP and its fudge-it budget. Our government is laying the facts out in this bill so British Columbians know the facts and they actually know the truth.

Bill 48 is a bill that has enabled our government to ensure more money is in the pockets of working British Columbians and their families — unlike the NDP plan, which has always been to say one thing and then, right after, raise the people's taxes. The record speaks for itself. You just have to go back and check the record of the '70s and the record of the '90s. I know the NDP doesn't like us bringing up those '70s and '90s, but somehow, with that party, history will repeat itself.

Bill 48 is about protecting the tax reductions for small business, the key to B.C.'s economic growth and job creation. It's about protecting the accelerated 44 percent reduction in small business tax that has put \$140 million-plus into their pockets. That is a move that our government made, which the NDP voted against.

Bill 48 is about putting laws in place so British Columbians can fully partner with Canada and the communities so we can accelerate infrastructure projects in every region of the province now, so we can create jobs now for the people of British Columbia and the families of British Columbia. The NDP has voted against that also.

Bill 48 is about protecting our commitment to funding health care and education and to assisting those truly in need. The NDP has also voted against increased funding for health care and education.

Bill 48 is about paying down our operating debt, which the NDP doubled in the '90s. Every cent of surplus in the future as we go forward must pay down the operating debt until it's paid off. Of course, the NDP had eight debt plans and never completed one of them.

[1010]

Why do the NDP have to be so negative, so desperate, so pessimistic? Bill 48 is about leadership in the real world we live in today. I'm proud to be part of a team with strong leadership committed to growing B.C., creating jobs with a vision to be the best we can be.

I am for the future of British Columbia. I see positive things, unlike the NDP and their negativity that never ends. The NDP members have spoken often about May 12. I am very, very confident that British Columbians will remember that the socialist horde is at the doors. British Columbians will remember the socialist hordes of the '70s and of the '90s. That's what they'll remember.

I am confident that British Columbians will vote for the strength of an individual, for the strength of small business — where they will grow; they will prosper — and then we will have the funds to protect health care and education. That's what I'm for.

Mr. Speaker, I know it comes as a shock, but I will not be seeking re-election. I want to thank all of the members in this House — some of them I've spent the last 13 years with — and I will be voting yes on this bill.

C. Wyse: I think it is an honour and a pleasure to be following my colleague from Okanagan-Westside. Before I begin my dissertation, I would like to just point out that there are three things I will be discussing throughout my time discussing Bill 48, the Finance Statutes (Deficit Authorization and Debt Elimination) Amendment Act, 2009.

[H. Bloy in the chair.]

I will attempt to coordinate something that I thought that my colleague from Okanagan-Westside would be very, very familiar with, considering that that is where it

started. That is a thing called the social contract — the social contract that was put into place 60 years ago and that in actual fact had been adhered to until approximately 2000, regardless of who the governing party was. That social contract said that the resources and the wealth that came from those resources would be shared equitably amongst all British Columbians and amongst all the regions of British Columbia.

We will move not from ancient history. We are going to deal, in my dissertation, with recent history. We are going to deal simply with what has happened as we have moved from a social contract that existed between the government of British Columbia and its population.

We are going to visit such things in the last eight years as structural deficits. We are also going to deal with now what is being termed strategic deficits and the need for Bill 48. But I'm going to take two approaches. One will be a little more cynical on how we have arrived at the need for Bill 48 and why we are considering the need and justification for it. Then I intend to take a more optimistic, more compassionate approach on why we have ended up here with Bill 48 and why it is in front of us.

[1015]

I would like to begin with a quote, not referring to the name and changing it. The Premier "can think of one, and just one, circumstance that might persuade him to run a budget deficit: an enormous earthquake that ravages British Columbia's infrastructure and economy. 'Obviously, that's going to put us in a different situation.'" That is from the *Globe and Mail*, late October of 2008.

Then from the *Times Colonist*, late November 2008: "There isn't a sector of the economy that won't feel the impacts, but because we have diversified our economy, I think we won't see nearly the impacts that we might have expected."

This legislation is in front of us to change legislation that the Liberal government brought in. The Liberals opposed the NDP's 2000 Balanced Budget Act, saying that it had too many loopholes. They repealed that legislation and introduced their own, but not without first giving themselves three years of deficits. At that time they were referred to by the name "structural deficits" — but three years of them, regardless of what they are called. They took three years after introducing B.C.'s largest deficit ever on record of \$3.1 billion. They used the structural deficit to absorb their tax cuts and their program cuts.

If we are going to be looking at Bill 48, let's have a look at the effect upon my constituency of the structural deficit adjustment with the cancellation of the social contract that had existed between all governments of British Columbia and all British Columbians getting their services. A quick synopsis, not all-inclusive. There were the reductions of health care services in all of the communities where there were hospitals. There were reduced bed cuts, longer waits, and services were removed to the larger community areas.

We still to this date have not recovered from that effect upon health care — the lack of provision for seniors care. Those 5,000 long-term care beds for the seniors — not being delivered. Promises, for example, of the addition of those complex care beds in 100 Mile from two years ago — still no contract awarded. That's still leaving seniors who require that type of care in 100 Mile in acute care beds; still leaving seniors who require that type of care in assisted-living beds where that type of care is not available for them; still leaving seniors in that part of the province backed up in their residence, waiting to get into any type of care.

Paramedic coverage has fallen off the map consistently and regularly as a result of the adjustment to structural deficits in my part of the province. Regularly there are ambulance services not available in an area where geography is massive, where getting to the hospital where the beds have been shut down has been increased by the transportation differences....

[1020]

Education. Schools closed, class sizes increased, composition of student makeup, with the complexity of needs for those students in those classes increased. The list goes on. Home support reduced. The ability for people to remain in their own residence to receive care reduced.

I'm not dealing with decades ago. I'm dealing with here in this century. The adjustment to the structural deficit. It raises concerns of where this Bill 48 will take us as we now deal with the Liberals' plan for the strategic deficit. We are talking about a very short, narrow piece of time. We haven't even completed this decade, and I'm beginning to talk about the potential of more deficits than there have been balanced budgets. We have been talking about a government that claims to be able to handle all of these things, and here we are. But I do mention that this is the more cynical approach of why this leadership from across the floor has delivered it.

I haven't yet talked about the effect of this cancellation of that social contract put into place by that left-wing individual, Mr. W.A.C. Bennett — that individual. I haven't talked about the effect of the cancellation of the social contract upon small business people in the Interior.

Those contracts. Those government employees that lived and worked in those communities. Those are the salaries that were spent in the small business places. In Cariboo South hundreds of government jobs have been cancelled while we went through the social contract cancellation, structural deficit.

Go to Omineca. You'll find the same effect, as this government restructured with their deficit. Go to the Kootenays. You find the same situation.

Interjections.

C. Wyse: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm glad that you are listening to me.

The point that I now wish to make is that this government did inherit two balanced budgets that were passed on. They were also confirmed as being balanced by the Auditor General. That is what this government inherited when they took over: two balanced budgets that were authenticated by the Auditor General.

Interjections.

Deputy Speaker: Members. Members.

C. Wyse: I still haven't quite finished my more cynical approach to why we have arrived at Bill 48, and I can see that this cynicism of presenting the record since 2000 has hit a raw nerve. I understand that. As a matter of fact, what I do understand is that the Premier has expressed that he has had many sleepless nights over the fact that British Columbia would have to run a deficit.

[1025]

He also says why.... I'm assuming that he has lost sleep as we developed the worst record on child poverty. I also assume that he has lost sleep as we have had our record on property crime deepen, gang warfare worsen, seniors care fall off the radar, a homelessness crisis across all the province — not just in the large communities. You find homeless people now on the streets all across British Columbia. Those are equally, I'm sure, what my hon. colleague the Premier has lost sleep on. I will look forward to also reading those quotes, and then we will be changing what has been happening over the last decade. That is where we are.

We are dealing with Bill 48, which is now the explanation for the second round of deficits. The explanation that my hon. colleagues have used is that we are now moving into a strategic deficit. A deficit by any name remains just that.

So far the Liberals have had three deficits from 2001 to 2003. They had four surpluses from '04 to '07. I am going to return to the so-called golden age, and I am going to talk about the effect of this golden age upon the interior of British Columbia. I'm going to talk about the effect of that in Cariboo South. I'm going to talk about the effect of the golden age upon the industries of forestry and agriculture, from where I'm from.

I'm going to talk about my community where on Monday, 600 individuals received indefinite layoffs. I'm going to talk about the e-mails, the telephone calls that I am getting as these individuals are affected personally by what is going on — the reason why we're here talking about Bill 48, a structural deficit, a deficit.

But it is important, very important, that we be examining how we have arrived at this point and the casualties that have been left on the roadside, along the pathway, that has been chosen to be here. It isn't

enough just to be introducing this legislation that was put into place, which some people would say was simply political opportunism. But there has been carnage along the pathways that we have got there, and no better place to visit than in the Cariboo, in rural British Columbia.

If I had the figures from the last quarter that would be available, I would be in a more informed position to give a response. But I have been told that I must wait until the budget comes in.

Hon. S. Bond: That's how it works.

C. Wyse: I'm not arguing with how it works. I must wait, and when I have that information, when I see other things, I will have further comments to make.

But it appears to be, with the introduction of this bill, the Finance Statutes (Deficit Authorization and Debt Elimination), that we are preparing for at least two years of more deficits under the Liberals, which are now referred to as strategic deficits.

So within nine years, if we accept what this legislation is and add those on to this record, that will give them five deficit budgets and four balanced, and the four balanced budgets were within the record economic boom that was occurring around the world. During that period of time, look what happened to forestry. Look what happened to agriculture while we were on that watch. While those industries and communities and individuals sought support, they were ignored. I save that for later.

[1030]

At this point I would like to go to the more compassionate analysis on why we may have got here in this place. I would like to leave the more cynical approach that I've developed here and have a look at another possible angle of why we have arrived at this particular point of more deficit budgets than balanced budgets.

A general argument that has been used is that nobody could possibly have projected or predicted this crisis. However, there have been many signs that have been ignored. There were signs of a housing bubble. Then the real estate market crashed. Consumer and business confidence plummeted as people saw the turmoil in the United States. Commodity prices fell through the floor. Yet the government continued to follow the advice and economic forecasts of those who had failed to predict any of this.

Throughout the year of 2008, economic growth forecasts were consistently downgraded. The mainstream wisdom from people such as members of the Economic Forecast Council is predicting a quick turnaround towards the end of 2009. That means they're predicting a quicker turnaround to this recession than in any recession since the Great Depression.

Why should we now believe those forecasts? I mention that because this bill contains within it a sunset clause

of two years. It's much easier to change a date that is contained in the legislation than this particular introduction and explanation for a strategic deficit to be put in front of us.

Now, to start another possible explanation on why we have got here. I'd like to start off with a quote from the Minister — presently — of Community Development. This is from late November of 2008: "We are weathering a tremendous world economic storm in a ship that is riding fairly smoothly on troubled seas." I don't think anybody is arguing that statement. They may now be arguing about how troubled the seas are.

The introduction of this bill shows that British Columbia, contrary to the wisdom of the other side, has arrived. There may be an explanation on why we have such a time lag in recognizing what was happening around the world.

The government opposite aspires to the economic policy of Mr. Greenspan. Mr. Greenspan basically says that the money markets will look after themselves. Regulations are not required. Business corporations will do what is best for the economy. Industry will look after the natural resources and automatically do what is best for the environment. There will never be a need for a Bill 48 when you subscribe to that ideology.

That may also explain the slow reaction to all the indicators, because the ill winds that were beginning to blow around the world were not in line with that ideology. When you take that and put it into context of what has developed from that approach, the record shows that the large corporation is the one that has been looked after. It shows that the very wealthy are the ones that have been looked after.

[1035]

I can give you some examples that substantiate that effect. The gap between the wealthy and the poor here in British Columbia has broadened and widened during this decade. This decade — not the '70s, not the '90s. This decade has that widening that has fallen into place.

I have watched budgets that have been introduced here in which \$2 billion of taxation benefits were distributed, and 90 percent of those budgets, those figures, ended up benefiting 10 percent of the most wealthy. That has contributed to that widening, that disparity that exists here in British Columbia — something that the social contract with W.A.C. Bennett had put into place to ensure that as much as possible, the wealth of the province would be shared more equitably amongst all regions, amongst all parts of the province.

Interjections.

C. Wyse: The hon. Minister of Transportation... I'm sure if he hasn't had his place to speak, he will also have his opportunity. More importantly, that minister has had the chance to influence what has happened here to all

British Columbians. The record that I'm outlining here is not particularly flattering when we look at the issue of ensuring that all of British Columbia is dealt with fairly — economically, socially and with government services that are provided.

This government, in its term of office, has turned over the resources of this province to the corporations. They have turned over the forestry, the trees, to corporations, with no accountability for those resources to necessarily be dealt with and have their value returned to the province. Those resources belong to all four million people.

There are no assurances that those resources will be spent to benefit British Columbians. Forest companies have now been turned into land developers. There's where we are at, what we've become.

Regardless of how we may have got here and what the explanation may have been, we have arrived here. The Liberal government claims that deficits push our problems on to future generations. If they didn't have these deficits, the cuts to social services and education and health would be deeper. We put that record in contrast to when they put the structural deficit into place and where we ended up.

I don't have the figures from that third quarter, but I can take some information that we do know from the records that have to be shared with us as of this date. I will show you where the concern is in my mind.

[1040]

We are told that \$6 billion has been shaved off the provincial revenues over the next three years. In February 2008 they projected '09-10 revenues to be very close to \$40 billion, with approximately an \$800 million surplus. Spread over three years, that would mean at least a billion-dollar deficit in '09-10 without budget cuts and possibly more if the estimated revenues fall more heavily on the short term than on the long term.

They say that spending in health and education will be protected. That's about \$23 billion when you put in the advanced ed portion. All other ministries spend about \$8½ billion, and the officers of the Legislature, the servicing public debt and contingencies are another \$900 million. Finally, the net grants to service delivery agencies total \$5 billion.

These are all the February 8 projections for '09. Total expenses for that year are projected to be, as I've mentioned, about \$39 billion. So it seems like about \$25 billion to \$30 billion of expenditures are protected, leaving somewhere between \$10 billion and \$15 billion unprotected.

The question, then, as we move into putting this strategic deficit into place, is: where is that fund going to be found?

Hon. M. Polak: We are living in, no question, unprecedented times when it comes to the challenges that face us — not so much in how much money we've seen lost from revenues, how we've seen banks collapse,

how we've seen trusted businesses collapse. That's not perhaps the most unprecedented of the experiences we're having right now.

By far the most unprecedented is the unpredictability of it. Nobody seems to be able to figure out where the bottom is, when this is going to stop or what we're going to have to go through.

That makes this an extremely challenging time, and it brings us to perhaps what is the core of any kind of government in an elected world, and that is trust. Trust is what is going to be the most needed commodity for our government, for any government, to be able to get through these difficult and unpredictable times.

It lets me think back to some of the things I've learned about life, about money. One of the people that I spent a lot of time listening to growing up was my grandfather. He had a very interesting story, as I'm sure many of our ancestors have had, especially going through times like the Depression.

I remember the stories he told about getting on the railcar, riding out to British Columbia and going around the streets of Vancouver offering to do odd jobs for families around their homes if they would give him something to eat. He would not beg for anything. He had a work ethic that said: "I'm going to get there, and I am going to do it myself. I'm going to provide for my family." He wasn't unlike thousands of individuals across Canada, across North America — indeed, across the world at that time. He gained a lot of wisdom through that.

I remember, when I was starting out in life and taking my first job, my grandfather sitting me down and telling me about how he built up his reputation in business and how he started out being able to borrow some money and start a business.

Here's the story he told. He went to a businessman that he knew fairly well and said: "I want to borrow \$25." The man said: "Well, \$25. Why do you want to borrow \$25?" "I want to borrow \$25." The man loaned him \$25. Two weeks later he paid him back \$25. He went back to him, he borrowed \$50, and he paid it back a couple of weeks later.

He kept on building up a trust and a credibility with this individual until he was able to go into business with the man and start out on what would eventually be a way in which he built up a huge nest egg for my grandmother, my mother, their family. He built that trust and credibility.

[1045]

At the end of the day, as we deal with this economic crisis, it's going to be trust and credibility that leads us to a path where we can come through.

Why is it that you have the bond-rating agencies and others looking to British Columbia and saying: "This is the right decision"? We have economists saying: "This is the right decision. Running a deficit right now is the right decision. Doing it the way they're doing it is the

right decision." Why do we have them saying that? It's because they know that when we say we are going to get to a balanced budget in the third year, there's trust and there's credibility behind that. That's unlike what we saw in another era.

I was thinking about the impact of this kind of financial crisis on families. When it comes down to families — and it comes down to mine; my daughter's 21, and she's looking for work — it comes down to jobs. It comes down to: "Am I going to be able to provide for myself?"

It's interesting that even during a time of unprecedented growth in British Columbia.... Well, what should have been for British Columbia, but growth around the world....

When we are looking at the legacy that was left in the 1990s.... I was looking at it, and I thought that this might be a projection of things we ought to be afraid of if they were to come upon us now. I mean, what would we think?

What would it mean if we looked out a few years from now and found that our youth unemployment rate was at 17.4 percent? What would it mean if we looked and saw that we had an unemployment rate overall of 10.1 percent? What would it mean if we suffered the highest unemployment rate of all the western provinces year upon year? What would it mean if we ranked last in private sector job creation?

You know what it would mean? It would mean we were back in the 1990s. That's what it would mean. The 1990s left us a legacy of job loss and financial struggle for public services like health care and education, but the very worst part of that legacy wasn't any of those things.

The very worst part of that legacy was a legacy that was built by budget target after budget target after budget target that was never met. That was a government that didn't deliver a single education funding announcement in the entire time they were in government. They didn't deliver it once on time, and it was their target. That left the worst legacy of all — a legacy of mistrust, a legacy that said that British Columbia doesn't know what it's doing, a legacy that said that you can say what you're going to do, but you're not going to deliver.

And what did it result in? We had our credit downgraded. We went from being the leader in Canada to being the last in Canada. That legacy of mistrust, that legacy of the lack of credibility took us into the tank at a time when we should have been soaring above the rest of Canada.

I'm glad that, as we reach this time when trust and credibility are needed, we don't have to deal with that kind of legacy, because we have a different one. Let me remind you that when this government took office, there were all sorts of reasons why a balanced budget shouldn't have been possible.

Even though the members opposite want to talk about the fact that it took time to dig us out of the hole that they'd gotten into, the fact of the matter is that when

it came to the year when the budget was supposed to be balanced, we had almost everyone.... In fact, as I looked through the record, I couldn't find anyone. I'll say "almost" in case there was someone out there I didn't notice, but we had almost everyone saying: "You know what? Don't do it. It's too hard right now. There are too many things going on, and everybody will understand if you don't deliver a balanced budget."

We had things going on like SARS. We had forest fires. We had 9/11. We had the tech meltdown. We had all sorts of unprecedented crises going on around us, and yet, in spite of a tacit permission being given from economists and commentators and pundits all around, you know what we did? We stuck to our word, we stuck to our target, and we balanced the budget.

It's that trust and credibility that has brought us back to a place where our credit rating is back to the high place it should be. It's that that has given us the ability to build on the natural resources and talents that are here in British Columbia to take us back to first place.

What does that mean in our time? The member opposite described all the projections that we've been hearing over the last many months, people who've been trying to use their financial crystal ball to determine just exactly what's going to happen, and they've been wrong. Forecasters have been wrong. Economists have been wrong. Well, I've got news for you. It's all right if they're wrong, because you know what? At the end of the day, they're not the ones that have to deliver on the promises that we've made.

[1050]

We have to be right. For the sake of British Columbians and for the sake of their jobs, for the sake of their families, we have to be right.

So what were the choices before us, and what choice does this bill represent? Well, there was a choice. It's a familiar choice to British Columbia governments. There was a choice to say: "Here's a piece of paper that represents a balanced budget. Here it is. You can read it. The numbers are there. It all lines up, and it's balanced." It would have meant severe cuts to services that we value, like health care and education, but we could have done it.

What would have happened a week later? To the member who says that we should have been watching the projections, listening to the projections, seeing what was going to go on, figuring it out: well, I've got news for you.

That's the very reason we're here today debating this bill, because we took a look at the unpredictable nature of the financial situation around the world, and we said: "You know what? We could deliver on that balanced budget." But being honest with ourselves and looking at the projections that we're getting, we know that that budget would not only not have any credibility but probably only a short time later we would be coming in to say: "You know what? We can't do it." We can't do it.

We had a choice. We had a choice whether or not we were going to be honest with British Columbians, maintain that trust and credibility and maintain it for those in the rest of the world who are the ones who give us our credit ratings that ensure that we can keep British Columbia strong.

We had a choice, and that choice is represented today by what I think is a very courageous move on the part of a finance minister who we all know had a very difficult time accepting that British Columbia was going to have to go into deficit.

That choice is a choice that the opposition members, when they were in government, did not make. They were faced with the same choice. They had a choice of presenting a budget to British Columbians that was credible, and they didn't. They chose before an election to present a budget that was balanced and to come back after an election and say: "Oops. Sorry."

I'll tell you what happens in my life or for most British Columbians if we do that. The creditors start to phone. People start to complain that their bills aren't paid. Pretty soon your hydro gets cut off.

Well, in government what happens is that it's British Columbians who suffer. They get laid off. They lose their job. Companies leave. Investment leaves. What does that mean? Less money for education. Less money for health care. That's what that means.

There is an awful lot at stake as we debate this bill. It's not just about whether or not we should have some numbers that total up at the end of the day. It's about: how do we give British Columbians the courage, the faith, the hope to get through a time when we can't tell them that we know for certain what the financial world is going to look like in a number of years?

But we can tell them this. We can tell them that as we've put out targets, as we've put out budget plans, we've met them and we've exceeded them. We can tell them that we've put in place restrictions that will make sure that we are held to account for our financial plan.

This deficit that will be temporary for two years.... This is not something that takes us away or lets us get away from an attitude of fiscal discipline that has kept us at the forefront of Canada for this number of years that we've been in government. On top of allowing the two years of deficits, this is also a bill that will require....

We're also going to require that every dollar of future surpluses.... And guess what. We've been able to deliver on surpluses. Every dollar of future surpluses is going to be used to pay down that operating debt that we incur. And ministers are still going to be held to account.

So we will have deficits that we've planned for the next two years, but we as ministers will still be held to account for the performance of government financially and for the performance of our ministries. Our holdback will not be delivered if we don't perform. There's incentive built in for us to still be sharpening our pencils and working hard on behalf of British Columbians.

We have to be looking at the way we manage in government in a way that builds trust for British Columbians. We have to be looking at what their future is. We have a future to deliver on, and it's theirs. We have young people who were singing out in the hallway today, singing *O Canada*. They want a future. They want a future that includes a job, but they also know that they have people they can trust — their parents, their families around them. Can they trust us?

[1055]

Well, we're saying: "Yes, they can." And why? Because of what my grandfather taught me — right? How do you figure out if you can trust somebody? You figure out if you can trust them based on their record. That's what you look at. What have they done? How have they treated me?

There's that old saying. Fool me once; shame on you. Fool me twice; shame on me. If we take a look at the record of the 1990s, I don't see a lot of reason for trust there.

B.C. fell from the first to the worst. We ranked last in Canada in private sector job creation. Private sector investment just absolutely left British Columbia. B.C. suffered the highest unemployment rate of all the western provinces every single year between '91 and 2000. Real disposable income dropped every year between '91 and '96. If you don't think that's an issue of trust for British Columbians who are trying to eke out a living as job losses mount during the economic crisis.... Believe me, that's important.

We had the highest taxes in all of Canada. Right now we have the lowest. We have an awful lot to protect as we debate this bill, and the threats are all around us.

Only today we heard about a new plan that the opposition has to bring in. I was a little, I guess, miffed at the terminology that the media and others are choosing now to portray this new plan with, because I've always been a big 007 fan. To find out that we've now got a deal with a "James bond" that isn't 007 kind of bothered me a little bit, but it's probably about as fictional as the spy character that we're all so fond of.

It's fictional, and it's also a repeat, like the James Bond movies and books. We've all seen them before. We've seen this movie before too. This movie was out in the 1990s, when the government of the day, the then NDP government, also launched a bond program.

As with sequels.... This one, I hope, does better than sequels do, but I have a feeling it's going to be a flop, just like the first film. The first film came out with great fanfare. Everybody projected box-office revenues that were going to be incredible and take that movie to the top of the list, and instead, what happened was that British Columbians got hosed for \$143 million. That's a flop by anybody's estimate.

Here we revisit it again — today the Leader of the Opposition announcing the new "James bond" that will

cost British Columbians, I'm sure, far more than \$143 million when you factor in rates of inflation and what money costs today. It's what we're going to see over and over again — revisiting the old plans.

You can tell whether or not you should trust someone or some group by what it is they've done. Sure enough, just when we didn't think we needed further proof, we get it in the form of a sequel to that first film in the 1990s.

We see plans trotted out that just have no basis in reality. Maybe that's another film. Maybe the next one should be the sequel "The Carbon Tax: Part Deux" — the NDP sequel, the one that would hide behind financial infrastructure statements that wouldn't be upfront, like the kind of carbon tax that we have, and instead would cancel the existing one and blow a \$800 million hole in the budget.

We have financial plans with no credibility. We have a new movie sequel that's going to cost British Columbians more, and at the end of the day, most disturbing of all is that we have a plan coming from the opposition that has zero credibility at a time when trust is really the only commodity that still has value in our world.

I'm proud to be supporting this bill. It takes a lot of courage to make adjustments and to change when circumstances around you change. But we've got a legacy of trust and credibility to maintain. We've got commitments to keep to British Columbians. They're counting on us to deliver. I'm proud to say that by any measure, we've delivered in the past.

We will deliver in the future, and we're proud to be working with British Columbians to build a future for a great province that will weather this storm and come out stronger than it's ever been.

[1100]

D. Routley: As usual, it's a great honour to be able to rise and speak in this wonderful Legislature, put here by the people of British Columbia in order to uplift the interests of common British Columbians to the highest place possible. To my way of thinking, that's exactly why this place is so ornate and so special.

The previous speaker talked about trust. Trust. How can we trust the B.C. Liberal government? Well, she said that you can trust someone or not by what it is they've done. And what is it that the B.C. Liberal government has done? We're here to discuss Bill 48, the Finance Statutes (Deficit Authorization and Debt Elimination) Amendment Act, 2009.

Well, a nice title, but what it does is allow the government to break yet another promise to British Columbians — a promise that never should have been made had they been prudent about the fact that we live in a resource-dependent and commodity-price-dependent economy that does move up and down with the vagaries of world markets.

But when those promises were made a few years back for political expedience, there was no such caution offered to the people of British Columbia. No, deficits were simply an evil thing that would never happen under the glorious rule of the golden decade of the B.C. Liberal Party.

Well, we've seen differently, haven't we? We've seen deficits throughout our communities. In fact, the first two years of Liberal rule led to the largest deficit in this province's history, and now we've had four surpluses during a world commodity increase in demand and price that had never been seen before. Yet who took credit for that? The B.C. Liberal government, this Premier and every finance minister who had the luxury of sitting through those exorbitant and increased and inflated commodity prices.

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Trust was one of the themes of the previous speaker. Well, we've been calling on the government to notice that there was something wrong in British Columbia, but they've been ignoring. We've been calling on the government to notice that conditions in classrooms had deteriorated, that schools were closing. We've been calling on the government to notice that during an unprecedented building boom in the United States of America we saw dozens of our mills close and tens of thousands of forestry jobs lost.

But this government just makes it up as it goes. It's a government of sloganeering. It's a government of bumper-sticker governance. They make up phrases: "operating debt." Now we hear about operating debt. Before, it was "structural deficit." Well, a debt is a debt, and a deficit is a deficit.

I spoke to a CEO in the province about what he thought about these phrases. He's a person who has spent years, decades, administering companies that found themselves in debt — put in place to rescue those companies. He told me: "They would throw me out the window headfirst if I came up with terms like those."

A debt is a debt, and a deficit is a deficit — simply. Debt is debt. It's long-term obligation. A business could go ahead and not declare a lease as debt, but its long-term obligation could just as easily bankrupt that business, as could any other debt.

The public-private partnership agreements entered into by this government form just such a type of doublespeak. They lead to unreported obligations, their contractual terms not even open to the scrutiny of those who are obligated to pay — the public, the taxpayer. This government has obliged its people to huge liabilities through off-balance-sheet accounting. This is how Enron was run. This is how Enron happened — hidden and unreported debt. This is Enron accounting.

I want to ask the Premier, the Finance Minister: how much? How much do we owe? How much are we obliged

to pay through all these secret agreements? We only have to look at the Olympic village as a case in point. Once the terms of that hidden contract were finally revealed, the people of Vancouver, the taxpayers of Vancouver, were shocked — were shocked to learn that they were liable for almost a billion dollars in costs. Hidden costs. Off-balance-sheet accounting.

[1105]

The people of B.C. want to know how big the obligations are that have been hidden, that we have been saddled with. And they don't know. We asked the government, and they don't know — or at least they're not telling.

If the government hadn't called this Legislature back — on a weekend, I might add, so that they might avoid the scrutiny of question period — every one of us in this province could have become liable for that project and its hidden costs. We'll set aside the timing of the calling back and the ducking of accountability for now, but what I want to ask now to this government is: how many more Olympic villages are there? How many more hidden costs are bubbling away under the cover of public-private partnership agreements? How many fiascos are yet to be played out through overruns and hidden costs?

If the government has obliged us to pay, they play an equally complicated shell game to cover up that obligation. In an article by Gabriel Yiu for the *Global Chinese Press*, Mr. Yiu estimates that the cost of public-private partner obligations added to the debt of this province would represent a 250 percent increase to the total obligations — or debt — that we face.

We don't know the full costs because the B.C. Liberals aren't saying. The previous speaker said: "Judge us on our record." She said: "Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me." Well, the people of British Columbia are asking the same question. What about the record? Fool us once, shame on us. Fool us twice, shame on me. In the common parlance, they make it up as they go.

No one believes you, Mr. Premier. You aren't credible, because you've misled us too many times. Like the Liberal insistence that the budgets in '99 and 2000 weren't balanced, when the Auditor General clearly states there were surpluses in both of those years — \$1.1 billion was the surplus that this government inherited. Like the Liberal claim to prudent fiscal management, when in fact their first budgets led to deficits, 2003 being the largest in the history of the province.

Those huge B.C. Liberal deficits were followed by a global economic expansion that lifted commodity prices and government revenues to record levels. But here in B.C., despite an unprecedented building boom in the U.S., we saw those dozens of mills and tens of thousands of forest worker jobs lost. Here, despite high demand and high prices for commodities like copper and coal, we saw continued cuts to social programs. We saw closed schools, closed courthouses.

We saw housing lists grow to.... Now 14,000 or more people are sitting on the waiting lists, waiting for affordable housing in this province.

Rather than building the province during good times, this government chose to pass the benefit to their friends while the rest of the province struggled with decimated programs and liquefied public assets.

Now that we've thoroughly trampled and dismantled any notion of B.C. Liberal reporting of debt, let's take a look at the notion of deficit. Deficit, on the current balance sheet, is what we're here to allow the government to do — breaking its own law. They said deficits were an evil thing. They said there would never be such an evil under B.C. Liberal rule.

Every time a minister ran a deficit they were supposed to be fined — 10 percent of their salary, I believe, was the penalty that was never imposed. Supplementary estimates were brought forward to allow more spending whenever that evil situation arose.

They avoided their own axe, and now the Premier says he lies awake fretting over the notion of running a deficit. He says he goes sleepless because his government may finally have to wake up and acknowledge that this province sometimes, being as dependent as it is on commodities and world markets, finds itself in deficit.

[1110]

Did he lie awake when British Columbians suffered his other deficits? There can be a deficit on a balance sheet, and there can be a deficit in service, a deficit in community. What this government has created is deficits in our classrooms, deficits in our hospitals, deficits in our care homes. Did he lie awake while those tens of thousands of forest workers lost their jobs during the height of that unprecedented U.S. building boom? Did he lie awake while homelessness increased by almost 400 percent under his watch? It is a deficit not having a home. It is a deficit to live in poverty. No, our Premier slept soundly then.

It was B.C. that tossed and turned in the nightmare of leading this country in child poverty for six years running. It was B.C. and British Columbian families that lived in poverty. Seventeen percent of our children live in poverty, and they don't live there alone. No, they live in poverty with their families, as the gap between them and the rich grows ever larger in a province guided by mishandled B.C. Liberal policies.

It is a notion that they have so willingly imposed on the lives of ordinary British Columbians, this notion of deficit, this notion of "you'll get what we'll give you." This is a deficit imposed on students who struggle with skyrocketing tuitions and burgeoning student debt. This is a deficit imposed on families who struggle and wait for affordable housing while the government papers over its promise of 5,000 long-term care beds by diverting federal housing dollars to cover assisted-living beds — not even meeting their original promise, but at the same

time denying ordinary British Columbians who struggle in poverty an affordable housing option.

Let's examine some other deficits in our communities. Take apprenticeship, for example. This government, in an ideological haste, wiped away the previous program, ITAC. They replaced it with an 8½-by-11 sheet of paper that basically said: "The market will take care of it," as they have done with so many other programs. Run a bulldozer through it, and replace it with a simple sheet of paper that says the magic of the marketplace will take care of it.

They created chaos in the system. Thousands of unsupported students—the Auditor General's report bears this out. They bragged about registrations by increasing the registration time, the time registrations were recognized, by over half.

Take forestry. The loss of the connection between our resource to our communities — that was what B.C. Liberal policies did to this province. Raw log exports skyrocketed. Hundreds and hundreds of loads of logs leave my community every day — or at least they did during a U.S. housing boom — while our mills closed and our workers went without work. Those were permanent jobs, or they should have been, but B.C. Liberal mismanagement of forest policy led to those losses.

Private land giveaways. The Auditor General pointed to this government failing to protect the public interest in the giveaway of private lands from TFL oversight on Vancouver Island — private land that was monitored and managed through a TFL system for the public good. But this government, once the Auditor General pointed to their failure to protect the public interest, chose to pick a fight with the Auditor General rather than face the fact that they failed the people of British Columbia.

Fibre shortages while logs rot on our forest floors. Over a 50 percent increase in the waste on the forest floor while our pulp mills were threatened with closure because they couldn't get fibre — at a time when pulp was at very high levels. Now that there's a slowdown, the B.C. Liberal government hides behind the current crisis and blames that for the loss of our mills when everyone in our industries, everyone in our forest-dependent communities, knows that for the past two years we've been losing those jobs and losing those community-supporting incomes.

[1115]

Take housing — Bill 27, the B.C. Liberal answer to housing in this province. That bill downgraded the penalties for redeveloping manufactured home parks. There used to be a minimum of \$10,000 per unit if a developer went to relocate the residents of a manufactured home park. That was reduced instead to 12 months' pad rental, which in most cases is \$2,000 to \$3,000, maybe \$4,000 if the people are lucky. That was a consumer protection bill that in fact should have moved up with its penalties along with market increases in the

value of the land. But instead, it was disarmed by this Liberal government, to the detriment of the seniors of this province.

What is the fastest-growing group of seniors in this province, by percentage? I'll answer you. They're seniors. So at a time when there is ever-greater pressure on that affordable housing option for seniors, that was when this B.C. Liberal government introduced Bill 27 and reduced the penalties for redevelopment. That was their answer.

Wait-lists. Some 14,000 or 15,000 people waiting for affordable housing from this government. How many cooperative housing projects have started under their watch? Zero — because they dropped the ball, because they didn't care.

Take health care as an example. We were told by the government when it was first elected that we would get health care where and when we need it. What did we get? Increased waiting lists, closed hospitals, hospital cleanliness plummeting, private contracts that have led to dirty hospitals, dirty conditions....

Interjection.

D. Routley: That has been audited as well, for the member across.

Seniors care. Absolute crisis in seniors care, with people being left in deplorable conditions.

Interjection.

D. Routley: I'll ask the member to remember the late Bill Cross, who came to this House to complain about having been improperly placed in an assisted-living building in Chemainus and going 109 days without a bath — 109 days. When he fell on the floor and rang his emergency bell, there was no staff on at night. Staff had to come from Duncan, 15 kilometres away, to let the emergency crew in.

Next time he fell and rang his bell, the emergency crew came and couldn't get in. So after that second incident the solution was to leave a key outside, under a rock. He fell again and rang his bell. The emergency crew came, only this crew couldn't find the key. They went around the building to his window — lucky he was on the first floor, wasn't it? — and knocked on the window. Bill had to tell them: "It's under the third rock away from the door." They went in and rescued poor Bill.

That is a direct result of a broken Liberal promise for 5,000 long-term care beds. That is another deficit created in our communities and a deficit which British Columbians struggle with every day.

Education. We had millions upon millions of down-loaded costs by B.C. Liberal policies — like increasing MSP premiums by 50 percent and not funding that increase for school districts, costing millions upon millions of dollars.

They claim the highest level of per-student funding. Well, I'd ask them to manage my daughter's allowance then. I'd ask them to manage her allowance. They could raise her allowance from \$20 to \$25 a week. I could tell her: "You've got more allowance than you've ever had before, but you've got to pay my MSP premium increase. Oh, and you've got to pay your mother the teacher's salary increase as well, and you've got to pay the increase in the heating bills."

She would come to me, and she'd say: "But, Dad, I'm in deficit. I don't have that much money." I'd say: "No, you can't run a deficit. Just ask the B.C. Liberals. 'You've got more money per student than you've ever had. It doesn't matter what costs I download onto you.'"

That's the way they manage our classrooms. That's why there are 10,000 classrooms, approaching 11,000, that have more students than Bill 33 — their own legislation — allows. That's a deficit. That's a deficit in a classroom. That's a deficit that pays out into a debt in the future, a debt that is played out in a poorly prepared workforce and people who are less able to contribute to their communities.

[1120]

We wound up, as school boards across this province, having to cut from the most vulnerable students, particularly special needs students. In Cowichan district, transportation cuts led to the cancellation of programs like therapeutic swimming and therapeutic riding. And for the students who benefited from those programs, the physical therapy that therapeutic swimming allowed and the abilities that it gave them, those programs were every bit as core as math or English or science for any other student.

But this government, despite all the warnings of these deficits — all the warnings of the deficits in classrooms, in hospitals, the homelessness, the lack of housing — chose to ignore these. Simply by declaring a golden decade, they could wipe away the effects. Great phrases. It's a government of slogans. It's a government that governs with bumper stickers, one laid over another: "Best place on earth" to "Work. Live. Play."

Interjections.

D. Routley: And they still applaud it, despite the homelessness, despite the loss of forestry jobs, despite the wait-lists for housing, despite seniors being displaced from care homes like Cowichan Lodge.

Interjections.

D. Routley: Oh, yes. The member says it's negative. It's negative, Madam Speaker, to refer to the plight of seniors who are being dislocated after another broken Liberal promise that they would open private long-term care homes without dislocating public beds. That was

a broken promise. There's another word for it. It's unparliamentary. But every British Columbian knows what it was, and they were given it by the government when they were told that they wouldn't lose their public beds, and they did. Study after study shows that 10 to 15 percent of seniors are lost almost immediately upon such a dislocation. But did they listen to that? No. Arrogance. It's unaccountability.

Accountability means looking back, looking back at the record that the previous speaker spoke of. The record of having dislocated thousands upon thousands of British Columbians from their schools, from their long-term care homes, from their jobs as forestry workers. They ignored these crises. They stood back and allowed the gap between the rich and the poor in this province to grow, and they stood on the sidelines and watched our forestry industry shrink.

This lack of promise, this breaking of promises, leads to the most toxic ingredient in our communities, and that is cynicism. That people, when they're told that a phrase like "new relationship" means something, and then find out that the new relationship is just as abusive as the old relationship. Well, they have their hopes dashed. They have their hopes dashed against rocks of cynicism that lead to a failure of people to embrace true optimism and true hope, a program that would invest in them and their communities first, unlike what we've seen for the last eight years.

On May 12 British Columbians will re-establish that hope, that opportunity, that priority.

It is about priority. The priority of this B.C. Liberal government has been to hand over this province — hand over the benefits of the province, hand over the seniors to their friends for private care options, herd them away from public options and drive people out of public education. Those are priorities.

Those are priorities that have created real deficits, not simply notional deficits that are played out in slogans like "Operating debt." Debt is debt.

Hon. K. Krueger: It's an accounting term....

[1125]

D. Routley: Debt is debt. It is not an accounting term. It is a made-up B.C. Liberal term like structural deficit. A made-up term. A deficit is a deficit. That's what we're here to allow the government to impose on us, and debt is debt. Debt is long-term obligation, like the obligations that that member and his government have placed on this province through the hidden contracts they've entered with their private partners.

The speakers on the other side have resorted to the most desperate means to portray their deficits as surpluses. Golden goals. They won't rest until B.C. has the best services for disabled students. Yet what do we see? We see classrooms overloaded with special needs students

who are denied service. We see lineups, wait-lists for designation because it's better not to test and not to designate than be obliged to pay. British Columbians want adequate achievement. They need housing. They need adequate care for their seniors. They need classroom conditions that allow their children to learn and preserve our place as one of the world leaders in public education.

The B.C. Liberal government took credit for grade 12 graduation rates in their second year — rates that were obviously established with a good foundation in early years, much earlier than their rule.

They avoid responsibility for the hundreds of closed schools, the 10,000 overloaded classrooms. Yet they say what kept them awake was the spectre of a deficit budget in a province dependent on world commodity prices and world markets. They said we were immune. They said that that was an evil that would never be suffered under the B.C. Liberal government. They were wrong.

They've hidden the costs of the Olympics. They've hidden the cost of pet projects. They've hidden debt from the province through public-private partnerships. They've failed to report the true situation to British Columbians, and no one believes them. No one believes that the Olympics would cost \$600 million, as they continued to claim. No one believes that our debt is what they claim when we know that public-private partnerships oblige us as a province, just as they did Vancouver taxpayers to the Olympic village project.

What they don't need is a B.C. Liberal government that continues to deny the obvious, that continues to paper over its broken promises with cynical sloganism. It's time for the B.C. Liberals to come clean with the people of British Columbia. It's time for the province of British Columbia to see the true picture, for this government to lay bare the true costs of all of those agreements, for them to finally acknowledge that people have been suffering with deficits for years — homelessness, housing, classroom deficits, closed schools, closed hospitals. That's the reality of what this province has been delivered by this government. It's a sad reality.

The noble phrase is "Beautiful B.C." That gives it to the province. The arrogant phrase is "best place on earth." That takes it from the province. This government has taken it from the province — has taken the wealth of the province, handed it to its friends. It has liquidated the public assets and the public wealth of our province. That is very sad. So this deficit may sit on a balance sheet, but the real deficit that costs British Columbians their lives is played out on the streets and sidewalks of this great province and in the classrooms and in the hospital beds, and that is a sad shame for British Columbia.

I call on the government to turn itself around or sit down, and on May 12 allow British Columbia to re-establish the priorities that matter to ordinary people.

C. Evans: I rise ostensibly, at least for cover, to speak on Bill 48. I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Community Development for giving me the opportunity to speak, and my colleague for moving right along so that I could stand.

I wanted to speak at the present moment in order to introduce my son Phillip, my daughter-in-law Simone and their three children — Madeline, who is about three, and Sydney and Dawson who are six, just going on seven. I wanted to try to get this in. I think this must be a difficult process to watch if you're six or seven, and so I wanted to talk kind of quickly while they might still find it interesting.

I'm going to try to say this pretty quickly and explain a little bit about what's happening here, because I think this is a very cool thing, and I hope you might someday work here.

When you play soccer, there's your team and another team, and it's just like that here. If you look straight down, there are some folks over there, sitting there, and that's the other team. Then there are some folks on my side here.

Anyway, on this side, this is our team, and you can't play the game without the two teams. Then there's got to be a referee, a person who sees to it that we're nice to each other, and that's the person sitting in the chair at the front. Can you see that woman there? She's called the Speaker, but she's the referee — or kind of, in a school sense, a principal.

Lots of times we say things to each other that aren't nice, but we want to make sure that we don't hurt somebody's feelings, so I'm not allowed to say their names. I can't say Fred or Mary or Sue or John, because it might hurt Sue or John's feelings. I can just say: "The hon. member."

The other side is way over there, so even if I lose my temper, I can't hit them, or if I had a sword, I couldn't swing it and hurt them. We set it up here so that we could argue, but not be unkind. I think it's quite a wonderful thing. All of these people here, kids, are getting paid money to argue with the other folks but not to hurt them.

I think the argument is important because, you know, when your brother does something that annoys you, you have a side, and he has a side. But there are always two sides to every story. So they tell one side, and we tell the right side.

I know there's hardly anybody watching, but yesterday you saw the men downstairs with the televisions — all those cameras. Those folks are showing what these people say to the whole world. You go home, and you can watch these people. These folks and these folks are trying to tell the people outside what it is that's happening while they manage a thing called the Crown, which I cannot possibly explain in ten minutes or less.

We are arguing here today about something that's really hard to understand, but it's called borrowing money.

Dawson, imagine Sydney has a yellow crayon. You guys are colouring, and you want to borrow her crayon. You say: "Sydney, can I borrow the crayon?" She gives it to you for a few minutes so you can have the yellow one.

Well, when grownups borrow something, it isn't just for a few minutes. We borrow the yellow crayon, and then we have to give back two crayons, or maybe sometimes a whole box of crayons. Where are you going to get the money to give Sydney a whole box of crayons? You've got to borrow it from your parents, and that's what borrowing is about.

We're not proud of it. It's a very funny argument that's happening here, because we're arguing, and they're arguing, and in the end we're going to agree. We're all going to agree to borrow money. Why is that?

[1135]

Well, Dawson, you've got your own bed — and Sydney, and Madeline — and you get three meals a day, and your parents put a roof over your heads. The people here are afraid that if they don't borrow money, there will be some kids without a bed to go to sleep in or a roof over their head. There will be some kids that don't have breakfast, lunch and dinner. Nobody wants that to happen, so they're going to borrow money, but they're not proud of it because it scares them.

How come it scares us, Daws? When you need money, you get it from your mom and dad. When we need money, we have to go dig big holes in the ground and take coal and ore out. Sometimes we have to flood land and build dams and cut down trees and pump gas out of the ground and kill salmon, fish. If we do too much of that, then there are no salmon and trees and dirt and flowers and stuff for you guys when you are our age.

So the people here are trying to figure out how to borrow money and be able to pay it back without wrecking your world. I think it's very cool that those guys have a side and we have a side, and that in the end, we will agree to do something for you. All the arguing is really how to not do it in a way that messes with your life. When Madeline is my age, we still want there to be fish and trees.

It's so much harder than borrowing crayons, but some day.... You live in a country where you can work in the castle. There's no king here, Daws. I know I introduced you to a woman yesterday, and I told you she was the princess. That's because she's my boss. But there's no king. There's no army. Regular people working on both sides, and you can do it some day, and then I can come and visit you.

I thank you, hon. Speaker, and I thank you hon. Members, for indulging me this moment. I really, really thank Simone and Phil for bringing the family here so I could have a chance to talk to them.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Hon. K. Krueger: I want to congratulate the member opposite on the opportunity to speak to his grandkids in the House. He came around and said that he'd like those few minutes, and he was welcome to them. Although he's told them that there is no king and there is no queen, they know they're in a castle, so you're going to have a little trouble explaining that, hon. Member.

A young friend of ours visited here, and his folks told him that this is where I work. He said: "My uncle works in a castle?" It's a pretty grand place. I'm going to miss the member who just spoke when he's gone. He's not running again. He's been a very colourful part of my whole time here.

I wanted to respond to the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith on a number of the things that he said. As always, I find it really surprising that he believes the things that he says. There were some astounding statements uttered today that were completely erroneous views of the past and the present, and it makes you wonder how a person elected to represent constituents has any hope of doing well for them in the future.

Unlike that member, I was here during the NDP years. Like him.... I think he's lived in British Columbia all his life, and I've lived in British Columbia most of mine. They were some of the most awful years we've ever experienced, in pretty much every way that you could describe. It was a grim time. We went from being the very best performing economy in Canada to the very worst, and we languished there for a long time.

The most important export that British Columbia had in the '90s was our youth — young people who knew there were no prospects here. With 10 percent of our population on welfare, they saw no future. So they left, and they started their working lives and started their families in places like Alberta and the United States of America. They put roots down, and it's hard to get them back.

That's one of the reasons that we have lost 50,000 students enrolled in our K-to-12 system. That is very egregious. It's something that is, I'm sure, regretted by members on the other side of the House, as it certainly is by government members. It's something that we hope to never see again. We know that this is the best place on earth, and I think that the members opposite think that too.

[1140]

People don't leave for reasons that are minor. They leave when they have no hope, when they see no vision by the government of the day, when their prospects are very poor. That's what they did, and it was tremendously regrettable.

When I was elected in 1996, the NDP Premier of the day had run on a balanced budget. We were no sooner in this House, and he said that he was going to need some wriggle room — and he needed a lot of wriggle room, as it turned out — and continued to run up huge debts.

The debt of this province was doubled in the NDP years — ten short years after 125 years of previous government — and the NDP government of the day doubled our debt and left us paying the interest on that. The third largest expenditure of government at the time. Health care first, education second, interest third — because of those accumulated debts.

The member opposite said some comical things. He said that we invented "Operating debt" as a slogan. The fact is we committed that we would follow generally accepted accounting principles as government. We've done that. The Auditor General has confirmed time and again that that's what we're doing. The Auditor General verifies the books that say that the NDP ran up over \$7 billion in accumulated deficits, and we have paid that off. We've completely paid it off, and that was a day to rejoice for British Columbians, when we paid off all that operating debt.

But it wasn't easy. We certainly had to postpone a lot of the things we'd like to be doing in British Columbia, but we did it because we had a fiscal plan that we'd laid out. It was a good plan. We stuck to it. We modified it in positive ways as we went along.

We had said that we would cut income taxes to the lowest in Canada for the first two levels of income, I think, by the end of our second year. We did it on our first day in office, the day the cabinet was sworn in — cut income taxes to the lowest in Canada — and we have continued to do that. We're now up to \$111,000 in income. British Columbians pay the smallest income taxes in Canada, and we full on intend to continue that.

The world has been rocked by an economic earthquake. Everybody knows that. The member opposite presumed to act as if he believed otherwise, but we're about the last jurisdiction to be dragged into the sorry situation of having to run a deficit budget in order to pay for programs. We believe that we will be the first out of that situation, again because of a solid fiscal plan, a foundation that we've built on that plan and the fact that we were successful in winning the bid for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

Our Premier was very much a part of the bid team. He travelled with them, he practiced with them. He did his part. We were all there the day of rejoicing, July 2, 2003, when we learned that we had, in fact, won the Olympic bid, and there couldn't be a better time to be hosting the Olympics. It's a matter that people are celebrating across this province, celebrating in my constituency last week.

Everybody is looking forward to it except, it seems, the members opposite who continually raise negative concerns about the Olympics. The venues are all built, all on budget, all at least 18 months ahead of schedule. Apparently, that's never been done before. I'm tremendously proud of how our province is preparing for the Olympics, the great job VANOC is doing, and I'm looking forward to a wonderful time one year from today. Surely

the members opposite could start to be more positive about that.

A whole lot of what goes on in economies is on the basis of whether people are feeling optimistic or pessimistic, and to always have this negative, destructive, pessimistic input from people in the Legislature just isn't good for British Columbians or for what's happening in our economy.

When their first Finance Minister — the NDP's first Finance Minister after my election — spoke about his budget, he said, and it was on the front page of *The Province* newspaper with his picture: "I don't expect you to believe me." And I thought: "That's really sad." And people didn't believe him, and of course, the budget didn't turn out as projected at all.

Well, the public still don't believe the NDP, thankfully, and I don't think they will on May 12 either. I think the public are very wise, very heads-up. They measure by results, and they're glad that we've taken British Columbia from the worst economy in Canada back to the best economy in Canada, alongside Alberta, which incidentally is facing the same sorts of challenges we are, and in fact, as I understand it, anticipating \$6 billion smaller revenues in the coming year than they would otherwise have forecast because of the things that have happened to the world economy.

[1145]

But neither Alberta nor British Columbia are in tough for the long term, because we have all the fundamentals in place. We still have the resources. We still have the highly educated workforce. We still have strong fiscal plans that these provinces are operating under.

We've broken down the barriers between our provinces — and now right across the country — by the leadership of our Premier, the Premier of British Columbia, so that we won't be wasting economic opportunity with foolish barriers between Canadian jurisdictions. Instead, people can go to where the jobs are. People can go to where the economy is perking, and that is British Columbia, compared to everywhere else, and will continue to be British Columbia.

The member opposite spoke about hidden deficits. That's something we certainly observed all through the '90s. It wasn't just that the NDP government was running a deficit every year but one. That year, I believe, the principle reason for not having a deficit was a correction in pension funds — being able to take surplus money from pension funds — as well as tremendous benefits from selling hydroelectricity. More power to them for that.

But the NDP didn't do a very good job of maintaining, let alone rehabilitating, roads all through those sad years of the '90s. That's what my constituents told me — constituents all around the province. There was certainly a deficit in roadbuilding.

The NDP didn't do a good job in building seniors housing. Not one single seniors bed built in the whole Thompson health region in ten years — not one. We've

been building new seniors facilities all over the region.

They never had seniors facilities in Clearwater before. They've got 21 extended care beds and a brand-new hospital that we built. The NDP had promised it to them well before I was elected. Never put a shovel in the ground. Never got started on it. Never did a thing. We built the hospital, and we built 21 extended care beds in it. The people of Clearwater love it.

We've built brand-new, beautiful seniors care homes all around the city of Kamloops, and all up and down the Thompson valleys.

Interjection.

Hon. K. Krueger: The member is barking about Ponderosa Lodge. Ponderosa Lodge is still open. It's the most ancient seniors facility in Kamloops. It's being used presently as a transition facility, a place to house people when they obviously shouldn't be in an acute care bed, because it's wrong for seniors to be stuck in acute care beds in a hospital where they don't have the kind of programs and the kind of life activities that they do in a facility that's geared all around them. But we move them through there. We move them into brand-new facilities.

Just recently I have attended ceremonies in two of our new facilities. At one, the seniors representative said, "They live like kings," and the media were there to record it. It was a wonderful story — how he felt about the facility he had moved into, a brand-new facility built in a public-private partnership arrangement with the private sector.

In spite of what the member for Cowichan-Ladysmith has to say about public-private partnerships, as well as his colleagues opposite, they've been a tremendous success — the private sector using its money to build infrastructure that's beneficial for British Columbians. Every one of those facilities has been built on budget and on time, many of them well ahead of the projected time, ahead of the deadlines.

Another seniors representative in Ridgeview Lodge, which is the most recently opened seniors facility of many in Kamloops, said: "A person in my circumstances could not possibly be any happier than I am in this home." They are homes. The people who live in them love them, and they have a social network and a good life.

That's not the way it was in the NDP years. There was an 18-month waiting list for seniors to get into a facility after their doctor said to their family that they needed to be in one and put their name on the list — 18 months.

I would have constituents come to me in tears, people in their 50s and 60s, because they were trying to care for their elderly parents in their 80s and 90s and weren't equipped to do it — working people, often, who had to go away during the daytime, but there was nowhere for seniors to go.

So it always shocks me that an NDP member would have the gall to stand up and criticize the B.C. Liberal

government in any of these areas, because we have done so much better than anything they were ever able to achieve. We went from 10 percent of the population being on welfare to jobs begging for people to fill them.

I've just concluded a run as the Small Business Minister, and that is still what small business is saying throughout British Columbia. Their biggest challenge is finding enough people to do the jobs that are already available, let alone the jobs that they expect are coming.

[1150]

A lot of small business people are approaching retirement age, and they can't find anybody to replace them in their businesses, to take over their businesses, because there is so much opportunity. It's a far happier province than it was in the '90s, and the opportunities are everywhere, in spite of tough times. The future is very bright.

We have built a tremendous amount of new infrastructure all around this province, and money has been very well spent. We continue to have a triple-A credit rating because of the very sound fiscal position that this government has placed British Columbia in.

The NDP in the '90s, with '90s dollars, spent a billion dollars between three boats that don't work and an old rustbucket pulp mill in Prince Rupert that still doesn't work. In fact, it was pulp mill workers that referred to that pulp mill in Prince Rupert, when all that money was going into it... Constituents of mine from the then Weyerhaeuser mill in Kamloops — flying out to work, being seconded to that pulp mill, being paid by the government — said: "This is as foolish as putting a brand-new motor in a rusted-out old washing machine, because this mill is never going to operate." It never has, and everyone knows now that it never will.

That's how money got spent in the sad and desperate '90s. British Columbia was rendered a have-not province. It's still almost unbelievable that we had to receive transfer payments from the federal government, because that just isn't something we ever expected to see in British Columbia. We certainly saw it then.

The mining industry was bombed into almost nonexistence by NDP incompetence, and perhaps even wilfulness, because I don't believe that the NDP would ever allow a flourishing mining industry in B.C. That certainly was their history in '72 to '75 and all through the sad decade of the '90s.

Last week I received the exploration investment numbers for my region, and it was \$35 million just in the Thompson region. That is 20 percent more than the entire province saw invested in mining exploration in one year toward the end of the sad decade of the '90s. That was directly because of the way an NDP government approaches the mining industry. They clearly don't like it. They overregulate it, they discourage it, and they scare investment away.

They would do it again if they ever — I don't think they will, and I trust they won't — form government

again. The mining industry would shut down rapidly. There wouldn't be exploration, because they all know what the future looks like with an NDP government.

It's dismaying, actually, to hear an NDP member stand up and speak as if the good old days were the '90s. There's hardly anybody in British Columbia that would say that. It bothers me that someone who has those views represents people that we genuinely want to help, because we want to see all of British Columbia prosper and everybody in British Columbia do well.

It's hard to work with members who deny the past, speak badly about a present that is much better than what they say and show very little promise of being able to lead anyone in the future, even as an opposition member.

An Hon. Member: They're desperate.

Hon. K. Krueger: The member says that they're desperate, and I think that's true.

We continually hear NDP leaders say things like: "The Premier hasn't done anything." That's on the radio repeatedly, and it is patently dishonest and utterly untrue.

The reckless incompetence of the NDP shipwrecked the economy of this province twice before, the two

chances that they've had. It was a miserable time for British Columbians. It'd be great if they actually stepped up to the plate and started to work with us, at least on things that they know for sure are really good for British Columbia, like the Olympics.

For Pete's sake, I appeal to the opposition to start getting positive about things that they know are positive, because negativity is bad for our economy, and it's bad for their constituents.

I would like to speak quite a bit more about this, but noting the hour, I think that I should probably move adjournment of debate.

Hon. K. Krueger moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. M. Polak moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:55 a.m.

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