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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

FIFTH SESSION, 38TH PARLIAMENT

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MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2009

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

Introductions by Members

K. Conroy: I rise in the House today to introduce the students of the Vision of Peace Youth Choir, who are here today to visit the Legislature. They've been here in Victoria for the last week.

Joining them is their teacher, Mr. Andrew Davidoff, along with a number of parents who are chaperoning them. They sang last night at St. Aidan's Church. I think there were over 400 people there. They also had an incredible banquet of amazing Doukhobor food. If anybody has had any of that, they know how wonderful it is. I was very, very sorry to miss that.

I'd like to welcome them all here. They're all from Castlegar, and it's a real pleasure to have them here in the House. Actually, I wish they could sing in the House, because they have beautiful voices.

Tabling Documents

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have the honour to present the Ombudsman's report No. 45, *Last Resort: Improving Fairness and Accountability in British Columbia's Income Assistance Program*.

Orders of the Day

Private Members' Statements

THINKING OUTSIDE OF THE BOX

J. Brar: I rise to make a statement regarding the narrow, self-serving and out-of-touch economic vision of the Premier of British Columbia and thus his failure to benefit from the emerging global economic opportunities such as India.

[1005]

Once upon a time B.C. was blessed with a hot economy as a direct result of the high commodity prices. The B.C. Liberals failed to convert that economy into a successful economy, an economy that benefits all British Columbians. They failed because their economic vision is too narrow and focused on self-promotion and the Premier's pet projects. As a result, the B.C. Liberals failed to build a strong, vibrant and diversified economy and to prepare British Columbia for the bad economic times we are facing today.

A brief look at the last eight years' economic record and mismanagement will tell us the story of their narrow

and self-serving economic vision. The B.C. Liberals have broken all records, wasting hundreds of millions of dollars of the people of British Columbia on cost overruns. The \$500 million cost overrun on the convention centre alone is a prime example.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

B.C. Liberals have wasted tens of millions of dollars in pre-election ads and hundreds of millions more on pet projects like the retractable roof for B.C. Place. They have spent millions on failed privatization schemes, delaying projects and wasting taxpayer dollars on offshore bidders. The Premier has also broken all the records by giving himself a raise of \$65,000 a year.

The message from this story is very clear. The Premier's economic vision was too narrow and self-serving, and thus he failed to think outside the box to see where and what economic opportunities were available out there for the people of British Columbia.

The Ministry of Economic Developments own report indicates that B.C.'s export performance in Asia has been slipping. The province's overall share of major Asian export markets fell from 0.56 percent in 1994 to 0.26 percent in 2004. Each 0.1 percent in market share is worth about \$85 million in annual exports to B.C. That means that B.C. lost \$250 million worth of annual exports in 2004 as compared to B.C.'s export share in 1994.

There were and still are a lot of economic opportunities out there. One of those missed opportunities was the Premier's failure to expand our trade with India. Almost overnight India has transformed its economy from a weak, developing status to global powerhouse. Now one of the fastest-growing economies on the planet, India is projected to be the world's third-largest economy by 2050.

The Ministry of Economic Development's own report states that India has the fastest-growing middle class in the global community. Its relatively young population will supply approximately 140 million new workers, one-third of all new workers worldwide, by 2020.

The government of Canada has identified India as a priority market and has developed a comprehensive market plan that identified the following sectors as offering clear market opportunities well suited to Canadian and British Columbian companies.

First, opportunity in India's agriculture sector includes commodities and food processing. Second, India is facing significant shortfalls in infrastructure and services, creating opportunities for British Columbian companies. There are also opportunities for B.C.'s higher education institutions. Third, India is the world's fastest-growing telecom market and is expected to be the world's second-largest by 2010. Fourth, to sustain its economic growth, India must significantly expand its electric power-generating capacity.

Clearly, the economic opportunities in India are unlimited. India will present B.C. with the next-largest

emerging trade and investment opportunities in Asia. India has a number of attributes attractive to B.C., including that English is an official language and is commonly used in business, Commonwealth history and transportation linkages.

Here in B.C. we have a strong support network of Indo-Canadian business associations such as the Indo-Canadian Business Association, the Scott Road Business Association and the Punjabi Market Business Association. In addition, in B.C. we have a well-established Indo-Canadian community with strong connections to the Indian leadership and business community. B.C. has proven strengths and capability and is best positioned to benefit from the Indian market opportunities.

[1010]

Therefore, the B.C. government has an important role to ensure that information about B.C.'s competitive advantages as an investment destination is effectively communicated to India. Clearly, it is a missed opportunity, because B.C. Liberals remain completely out of touch with the emerging economic opportunity in India.

It's about time to establish a B.C. trade and investment representative in India to promote British Columbia's companies and attract investment opportunities. The representative will promote investment by hosting investment workshops. The representative will develop export and marketing strategies for the emerging service export sector based on what India needs.

The representative will assist B.C.'s forest, mining, mineral, agriculture and seafood sectors in developing new programs and strategies that match Indian opportunities. The representative will also assist in connecting British Columbian companies to benefit from the unlimited opportunities to serve the large infrastructure needs of India.

I would conclude, and I hope members from the government side will support my proposal to establish a British Columbia trade and investment representative in India to promote British Columbia's small and big companies and to attract investment opportunity.

D. Hayer: I found the statement from the member for Surrey–Panorama Ridge quite interesting. When I was starting to think about the title he had, "Thinking Outside the Box," I said: "Gee, he's going to be thinking outside the box." In the 1990s, when the NDP was in government, they thought inside the box and took the economy from the best economy in British Columbia to the worst economy.

They took one of the lowest taxes in British Columbia in 1991 to one of the highest taxes in North America. In the 1990s most British Columbians were leaving British Columbia to look for jobs in Toronto and Ontario, because they totally destroyed the economy.

They were so unfriendly to businesses that businesses felt they were hated by this government. They were

leaving in droves, moving to Alberta and Ontario. As a matter of fact, the Premier of Alberta used to say that the best salesperson he had going for him was the Premier of British Columbia, because they were so much against business that business was going outside.

They did not do much to diversify when they were in government. Let us say that our government has done much different than them. Not only did we change this economy, which is one of the best economies in Canada, to the lowest income taxes in Canada, where businesses are paying one of the lowest income taxes in the G7 right now.... As a matter of fact, we are increasing our trade with China. We're increasing our trade with India.

I will agree with the member saying that we have to increase trade with India. Just recently, November 30 to December 8, the Premier was in India. We visited Delhi. We went to Chandigarh. We went to Bangalore. We went to Mumbai.

Just a year before that, the Premier was there again. He took some of the colleagues from here. He took heads of our universities from here. He took heads from our life sciences and many of our business leaders. He wanted them to see firsthand how India is growing.

This member, just before the election was being called.... My understanding is that he's leaving his constituency of Surrey–Panorama Ridge to run in another riding because he thinks his riding has changed by four or eight blocks — two kilometres. He might not be able to do very well going in there. Now all of a sudden he's starting to think about India.

Deputy Speaker: Member, I would just like to remind the House and yourself that highly partisan remarks are not the purview of private members' statements. It is the practice of this House and the tradition that statements remain non-partisan.

I would ask all members to please follow the guidelines of Standing Order 25A.

D. Hayer: Madam Speaker, I was just listening to what the member started with. He was totally partisan in this opening remarks, so I was just continuing on what he said when he talked about what our government did. I apologize if that offends the member opposite or if it was not in line with what you would like to see. I was trying to keep up with what the member was saying to make sure he understands what I'm trying to say.

On the other hand, I just want to say that we have already opened an office in Mumbai. We will be opening up more trade offices, which is much different than under the last government when they were closing them.

[1015]

We really believe that we have to increase trade with India, we have to increase trade with China and we have to increase trade with other parts of the world, because we want to make sure all the eggs aren't in one basket.

Because of what the government has done over the last eight years, we were able to do so many things — because of thinking outside the box. We were able to get the new hospital that's being built right now in Surrey at Fraser Highway and 140th Street.

As a matter of fact, we're also spending about \$600 million to expand Surrey Memorial Hospital and the tower. The emergency will be five times bigger, and we will also be putting a children's emergency centre in Surrey. That is because of thinking outside the box. We're actually putting in more schools in Surrey because we're thinking outside the box.

Why can we do these things? Because our government has worked hard to diversify the economy. It is diversifying in India, taking advantage of their growth. It's diversifying in China, taking advantage of their growth. It's diversifying here to make sure our policies are such that businesses are coming back here. Our policies are such that people from other parts of the Canada are moving to British Columbia, rather than how they were in the old days when they were moving outside.

We want to make sure that even in the future, British Columbians stay here and their kids stay here and work here. We want to make sure all the businesses know that British Columbia is open for business. Please invest here so that there are so many jobs that our people don't have to work at small pay. They can actually earn something like \$25, \$30 or \$40 an hour, and they can make sure that our economy is the best economy in Canada. They will make sure that our tax rates for people who are working are the lowest.

We want to make sure the economy is so good that — right now, when we changed our tax system, anybody who earns less than \$16,000 pays no taxes — it stays that way. We can even change that to higher pay so people who are earning higher have to pay no taxes. We want to make sure our businesses pay the lowest taxes.

My time has run out, so I look forward to continuing when I get some more time.

J. Brar: It's very interesting that I made a proposal here. It's a very good proposal — to open and establish a British Columbia trade and investment representative in India. It's very interesting that I didn't hear anything from the member on that particular topic. What I heard from the member is the same problem which I mentioned in the title of my private member's statement, "Thinking Outside of the Box." What I heard is a message box, which is within the box.

The member is talking about Surrey Memorial Hospital. I'm talking about opening an office in India. These two have no relationship.

Let me give news to the member. In fact, B.C. had a trade and investment representative in India in 1997. It was opened by the previous NDP government. It is very surprising. I was actually shocked to know that this government closed that office in 2002. That was completely wrong.

What we're talking about is diversifying the economy so that British Columbia is prepared, when we have....

Deputy Speaker: Member. I would like to caution you once more about partisanship. I would ask all members to please stay within the guidelines of Standing Order 25A so that private members' statements do not simply become an opportunity for excessive partisanship.

Continue, Member.

J. Brar: What I'm talking about is to diversify the economy to benefit, particularly in this situation, from the growing Indian market opportunities. That's what my point is.

We have had a very good economy in the past, but the B.C. Liberal government failed to convert that economy into a successful economy that benefits all British Columbians. That's my point.

It was very unfortunate to see that the government will close an office in India, which is actually a growing market. Everybody is going to India at this point in time, including the government of Canada, including the government of America. Particularly, I would like to mention that Ontario has its own office.

[1020]

This government has spent almost eight years, and they are still thinking of opening an office in India. That's a reality. The announcement was made last year sometime, and the announcement was made again a few days ago in this House. I want them to take action and deliver on the promises made by this government and open that office as quickly as possible.

That's my proposal. I was hoping the member for Surrey-Tynehead would support my proposal, particularly keeping in mind his own connection and the potential that India has for B.C. companies and British Columbia.

SERVICES

H. Bloy: I'm going to speak about something that I'm sure everybody in the House will support. It's something that's been going on for a number of years. It's about the 40,000 newcomers who come to British Columbia every year.

Two-thirds of those who come to Vancouver and the Metro Vancouver and Burnaby area are born outside of Canada. What is it about B.C. that's so inviting? You only need to look out the window wherever you live in British Columbia to see what it's like, especially this past weekend for the first two days of spring — bright and sunny. You know, the best place on earth.

We have a vibrant culture and a long history, but it is our multicultural society's acceptance of differences that makes us so welcoming. Anywhere in my riding, you can look around and see the diversity that's there, from the Chinese community.... The Korean community is very big

on North Road. It certainly makes for a great area to live in. Everyone who lives in Burnaby sees the vitality created by people from so many different cultures working and living together.

That's why ESL is such a great opportunity for new Canadians. In November I announced that the government provided over \$1.5 million to the Burnaby school district for delivering basic English training services to adult newcomers. H. Klein and Associates received over \$1.3 million for ESL delivery services. That's nearly \$2.9 million for Burnaby in 2008 and '09, which will help newcomers succeed in the province.

On top of that money, we also have the Burnaby Family Life Institute led by Jeanne Fike, which is helping new immigrant families settle into the communities and helping them find the new customs and the way we do things in Canada. In addition, the Burnaby school district received \$881,000 through the settlement workers in schools program to integrate children into their new schools and give parents the tools they need to help children connect with the Burnaby community.

I just want to talk about one of my own colleagues, the MLA for Burnaby North, who came to Canada at age 17. He went to high school to learn English. He just went for half a year before he went on to the University of British Columbia, where he graduated with an honours degree in science and then a master's degree in science. So these programs do work, and we have our member sitting here who can attest to that.

In 2007 we created Welcome B.C. to streamline the province's settlement, multicultural and immigration services under one umbrella so that newcomers are better able to adapt to their communities. Welcome B.C. builds a stronger foundation for immigrant successes and supports welcoming communities. We've spent over \$270 million investing in Welcome B.C.

Some of the people that have benefited.... There's a company, Tekion, that hires a number of immigrant engineers through the PNP program. They are thankful for this program. It's made them a leader in nanobattery technology.

We have in the Japanese community Kazuko Komatsu from Pacific Western Brewery, who has hired a number of people through the PNP program, as well as many other Korean and Japanese companies. The PNP program offers the opportunity for skilled immigrants to come here and put their specialty....

Over 2,000 people have come in the last few years. Only a few weeks ago Immigrant Services Society of B.C. received a \$476,000 government grant for services for youth facing significant language challenges and settlement barriers.

[1025]

As Burnaby welcomes more immigrants, the government and groups like ISSBC are working to ensure that they make the best of what they can be — a challenging

transition. In addition, we're giving the tools to both parents and children to help them integrate into Burnaby.

Just this last Friday I was at SUCCESS in New Westminster, where 30 companies were honoured by SUCCESS. I had the opportunity to hand out certificates to these companies, like Home Depot, Cara Consulting, HSBC and a number of other businesses — over 30 businesses who hire immigrants and take them on through special programs and in fact end up hiring over 90 percent of them. I say that's a real testament to what all companies in British Columbia are doing to help people, new immigrants, settle in this country.

There are so many communities SUCCESS helps by providing employment counselling and resources along with the immigrant services. There are so many people in British Columbia that are helped by such a wide range of groups here. It's hard to mention all of them, but there's one success story. There's Patrick Coady, who's the executive director of the British Columbia Internationally Trained Professionals Network.

Patrick is also the executive director of the Association of International Medical Doctors, where he's helping professionals who want to come to this country get into programs. The B.C. Internationally Trained Professionals has a program in Ontario where they're getting internships with the government. These internships — 85 percent of the people are being hired.

As we all know, there's still a shortage of employment, of good employees in this province for everything that the companies in British Columbia want to do. Even with this slight downturn in the economy, we are hiring. There are companies out there that want so many people, and it's a little difficult to get them at times, because we don't have enough.

Through all of these programs that our government runs or supports — through us and the federal government — we are getting the results, and we are getting the employees.

There's another success story. There's Sakya Newman, who's with the Internationally Trained Professionals group in Victoria. She came to Canada four years ago from Panama. She had two other jobs, both using her Spanish skills, but she got a job within the last year with the government working in her specialty.

It takes time, but there are lots of companies prepared to hire people to give them that Canadian opportunity. We always run into this: "Well, what experience do you have in Canada?" You have the degree, so how can you get the experience until you get your first job and get a meaningful job that you can contribute to society?

L. Krog: I'm delighted to rise in response to the member's remarks this morning around the issue of services, particularly as I represent the community that I do, which is one of the three oldest cities in the province of British Columbia and which has benefited from waves of immigrant groups over

its long history. Indeed, just last week I had the opportunity to attend the opening of a third portal that was sponsored through Snuneymuxw First Nation.

I'm always reminded that unlike other parts of North America, the first nations people welcomed all of these pale-skinned immigrants to this country. Indeed, our history in this province is not filled with the kind of violence that existed in other places. The aboriginal people here were welcoming. They provided services to us. We know that Sir Alexander Mackenzie never would have found his way to the west coast if it hadn't been for the aboriginals taking him along the grease trail. We're starting to rewrite and appreciate the full history of this province in a way we haven't seen it before.

Amongst those great waves of immigrants in my community, firstly, were the English — 1854, November 27, the arrival of the *Princess Royal* in Nanaimo. It's celebrated every year in front of the Bastion.

There were great waves thereafter of Welsh miners and miners from Croatia, from Italy, stonemasons; most recently, a significant Vietnamese community; and a very longstanding Indo-Canadian community in Nanaimo, who came to work in the mills. Many of those folks worked for the late Herb Doman and his companies. Rick Doman, to this day, bears the Doman name. I think he carries it with great pride because of the enormous respect that Herb Doman had in the business community.

Many immigrant families who were sponsored by him have contributed significantly to this province, including a former Minister of Environment in this very House, Moe Sihota.

[1030]

In my community the Nanaimo Multicultural Society is one of those welcoming institutions like the member has talked about this morning. It's a group that works very hard to assist new immigrant families in integrating into the community, finding employment, learning English, learning how to work with government and communities. It's all a very positive thing.

But in fairness, we must also recognize that there is an inadequacy of services for immigrant families in this province. And I say that in a non-partisan way, because there is no question, I think, that some communities, immigrant communities, who arrive here without perhaps the skills to integrate quickly and easily, see their children caught up in gang activities.

We see families that could otherwise prosper not prospering. We see numbers of foreign-trained professionals with great skills, who could contribute enormously to this province, driving taxis most commonly, working in low-level jobs. And by low level, I don't mean to disparage the work, but they are not jobs that produce the kinds of incomes that support families. There is much more that we could do.

It is one thing to come into this chamber this morning and talk about the services that exist and how important

it is, but it is also important for us to recognize as a province how much better we could be if we devoted more money to those particular services.

Everyone in this chamber, except for the leader of my party, who has some aboriginal heritage to her — she's the only person in this chamber of any aboriginal heritage — is an immigrant themselves, a child, a grandchild, a great-great-grandchild or whatever of immigrants. This country was built by immigration, and I think it's important to recognize the fundamental value to the economy and to the diversity and to the great cultural life of British Columbia that immigration has brought. It is to be encouraged. It is to be supported.

If we are indeed to maintain what I regard as our premier status in the world as the best part of the world to live in... We're lucky and fortunate to be born here, every one of us who has had that privilege or has had the opportunity to immigrate here — as my friend the member for Nelson-Creston did, gosh, I guess some 40 years ago now.

But we have to put the money where our mouth is, and that requires supporting institutions like the Nanaimo multicultural society in my own community, by ensuring that all immigrants are welcomed, that we give them every opportunity to fulfil their individual goals and to maintain the great diversity that marks this country — the kind of diversity that allows any tourist from anywhere in the world to come here and say: "This is the kind of country I want to live in. This is a country where people can coexist, work together and build a harmonious and prosperous future for each other."

That's what immigration is all about. Those services need to be devoted to that.

I'm delighted the member took the opportunity this morning to raise this issue in this House, because every time we think about it, it reminds us that there are literally millions of people around the globe living in dreadful circumstances, who would give anything to have the opportunity to come and live in this peaceful country.

H. Bloy: I'd like to thank the member for his comments. I would like to point out that over the last number of years a former member in this House, Lorne Mayencourt, and I worked with the international medical doctors, and we went to the government, and we were able to expand the number of residency spaces. The government has changed regulations so that now anyone who's licensed in Canada as a medical doctor can practise in British Columbia. We've started to break down some of the barriers that were left from the '90s in providing immigrant services.

You know, part of this, to be positive... I do thank the member for his comments, but I also think the member has to come across and start to support some things, because under his government, under the leadership of Carole James, they voted against every budget.

Interjection.

Deputy Speaker: Member. Member.

H. Bloy: Programs for skilled immigrants stalled under the 1990s. The provincial nominee program never got off the ground, but now today we've trained over 2,000 highly trained international people. In fact, in January the government announced the updating of the *B.C. Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services*, which will help newcomers in their first few months of arrival. It will be available in eleven different languages.

Everyone who lives in Burnaby can see the vitality created by the people of different cultures working and living together. That's why the programs such as ESL, English language services for adults, settlement workers in schools and programs under Welcome B.C. are such a great investment in our future. If it wasn't for immigration into this country, I'd never have met my bride of 31 years. There are a lot of positive things that go on.

[1035]

I look forward to working with all sides of the House to increase our population in Canada, to increase the immigrant settlement in our country, to bring in more trained professionals so that British Columbia continues to grow and so that British Columbia continues to be the leader in all of Canada as far as growth is concerned.

It was a privilege for me today to stand up and talk in the House about immigration.

RANCHING IN B.C.

H. Lali: Ranching, not just in British Columbia but across North America, is in trouble. There's no intention of blaming any single government or political party. There is enough collective guilt or blame to go around for everyone.

The fact is, all governments of all political stripes in Canada — including Social Credit, NDP, B.C. Liberal, federal Liberal and Conservative — have all contributed to the impending demise of the generations-old practice of family farms and family ranches through neglect, chronic underfunding, well-meaning but sometimes misguided policy changes, policy indifference or through punitive legislative and regulatory actions. Ranching faces a multitude of challenges.

Ranching is a renewable resource. B.C. has more than 5,000 ranching operations with annual beef sales of at least \$2,500. The beef industry's contribution to the B.C. economy totals \$1.4 billion, and the annual sales of cattle and calves is \$350 million.

Canada has the lowest supports for agriculture of all the G8 nations, and within Canada, it is B.C. that has historically provided the lowest supports of any province. Those supports have been steadily declining as a percentage of the overall agricultural GDP. In 1986 Canada provided 26.5 percent of agricultural GDP support, compared to B.C.'s 17 percent. In 1992 Canada was at 25.5 percent, and B.C. dropped to 14½ percent. In 2001 Canada dropped to

16 percent, while B.C. dipped to 6 percent, and in 2006 Canada lowered to 14½ percent, while B.C. dropped, again, to 4 percent.

In November 2008 the National Farmers Union put out a well-researched report called *The Farm Crisis and the Cattle Sector: Toward a New Analysis and New Solutions*. This report is a must-read for anyone wishing to understand what has happened to Canada's thriving cattle and beef industry in the last 20 years and why it is facing a crisis today.

The NFU is no left-wing bastion of social democracy. It is actually a fairly conservative organization, dedicated to the well-being and future productivity of Canada's agricultural industry. This report examines in detail what the contributing causes of the collapse of the live cattle producers across the continent are, including researching prices and data dating back 72 years to the Great Depression.

It is noteworthy to know that when adjusted for inflation, the current prices for fed steer between 75 and 110 bucks per hundred-pound weight unit are the same as those in the Depression era 72 years ago. The average from 1942 to '89, a 47-year period, was \$174 per hundred-weight, which is double the recent average price.

How could this happen? In the '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s, using packing plants that were comparatively inefficient, paying workers 22 percent more while serving a smaller market and selling to less affluent consumers, the system was able to pass back to farmers twice as much per animal. Looking at it conversely, in the latter 1980s and throughout the 1990s, packers built bigger and superefficient plants, cut wages and ramped up production to serve export markets.

The result of all this expansion, efficiency and cost-cutting is that farmers now receive half of what they did before restructuring. Cow-calf producers and independent feeders are suffering today because they have a problem that is real. Packers are paying feedlot operators half of what packers paid those feeders' parents and grandparents. In turn, cattle feeders are paying cow-calf producers half of what their parents or grandparents received. These half-price cattle are bankrupting family farmers across Canada and creating the most severe crisis in the sector since the Great Depression.

The NFU report suggests that a way has to be found to restore cattle prices back to normal levels. Why did cattle prices fall 20 years ago to levels not seen since the Great Depression? What happened in 1989?

First of all, May 1989 marked the beginning of a dramatic acceleration in the transfer of control of the meat-packing industry from a relatively large number of Canadian-based packers operating a large number of plants to two U.S.-based corporations that have concentrated production into a few huge plants — namely, Cargill and Tyson.

[1040]

Secondly, in January 1989 our nation implemented the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, thereby shifting Canada-U.S. marketing integration into high gear.

Thirdly, in the same period, as part of this process of continental integration, Canada began ramping up cattle and beef exports, mostly to the U.S. As our cattle and beef sectors expanded and refocused to serve external markets, Canadian cattle producers became overdependent on those exports. This overdependence has contributed to huge costs, including BSE losses, price discounts relative to U.S. cattle, traceability system costs, country-of-origin labelling and risks of future border closures.

Finally, at about the same time, as part of the integration, Americanization and corporate consolidation of the Canadian cattle and beef systems, relative levels of captive supply in Canadian feedlots also rose. Captive supply is a tactic whereby packers own or control cattle that are being fattened in feedlots in preparation for slaughter.

Captive supplies give packers an option. In any given week packers can bid on cattle from independent feeders, or packers can utilize their own cattle. Captive supplies give packers significant power to push down prices of finished cattle and thus push down prices of feeder cattle and calves.

Most importantly, the relative power balance between those who raise cattle — i.e., ranchers — and those who buy and process them — i.e., packers — shifted in favour of the latter. These major changes occurred in Canada, and changes in our country mirrored and amplified similar shifts occurring in the United States. These events on both sides of the Canada-U.S. border have had the effect of driving down cattle farmers' prices in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico and around the world.

The year '89 was a turning point for the Canadian beef and cattle sectors. In terms of processing, few of the packing plants that existed in the '70s or the '80s remain today, and today's big plants were opened in '89 or later. Not only are the plants newer and bigger; they're also fewer. As a result, many cities and some provinces no longer have a major beef plant — Manitoba, for example.

The companies that dominated pre-1989 are gone. The competitive landscape was demolished. In the '70s and '80s Burns, Swift Canada, Canada Packers, Intercontinental Packers and a host of regional companies operated many medium-sized packing plants spread across Canada. Regions — often even individual cities — had multiple plants. Those plants gave producers more options regarding where to sell their cattle.

As an example, in 1978 an Edmonton area farmer with slaughter steers or heifers to sell had five federally inspected packers to choose from in Edmonton alone, including Gainer's. Now they're all gone. However, those numerous plants were aggressive when bidding on farmers' cattle. Most important....

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

D. MacKay: I'm pleased to stand today and respond to the member for Yale-Lillooet. I'd like to thank him for bringing up the challenges faced by the ranching industry in our province and across our country.

I would just like to follow up on his comments where he said that no political party is to blame for some of the challenges that ranchers face. That just opens up the door for me to talk more about a personal issue that I had some experience with in a different lifetime.

I would like to acknowledge all the hard work that the ranchers do to provide meat for us — as well as their families. The rancher doesn't do it by himself. The family is usually there with him working.

Going back in another lifetime, I can recall being transferred out to Alexis Creek, which anybody who's been out there knows is ranching country out there. After having been in Alexis Creek for a short time, I think my wife became quite enamoured with the cowboy riding around on horseback, rounding up cattle and pushing them down the road or moving them to a different field.

My wife actually spoke about it a couple of times and thought about how nice it would be to live out there in cattle country, where you raise animals. But as I go on in my talk here, in my five minutes that I have allotted to me, I think you'll understand why my wife changed her thoughts on becoming a rancher's wife.

First of all, I can recall one winter day. It was extremely cold — very, very cold. It was so cold that the tails were actually dropping off the animals. They were freezing and dropping off the animals, and parts of their ears were missing because it was so cold.

We watched some ranchers or some cowhands move some cattle down past the RCMP detachment in Alexis Creek one day. Horses were covered with frost from the breathing of the animals. And the cows that were being pushed down the road as well were all covered with frost because it was so cold. I looked at these cowboys sitting on their horses. They didn't have all that warm clothing on. They had cowboy hats on, and it was really, really cold.

I was going to use another expression to describe how cold it was, but it was very cold. These cowboys didn't have anything on their ears.

[1045]

An Hon. Member: It's good you chose not to.

D. MacKay: It's a really good thing I did.

They had nothing on their ears, and I thought: "If that's what it takes to be a cowboy, I don't think I could do it." That was my first chance at watching these cowboys work.

We got invited to a haying party one day, and I thought: "Wow, we're part of the community." We got up in the morning, and it was a really, really clear sky. We thought it was going to be a really nice day, so we put T-shirts on and shorts to go to a haying party.

We got down on the field, and it didn't take long to understand why cowboys and their wives and their children wore blue jeans and long-sleeved shirts when they were picking up hay bales off the field that weighed 65 to 85 pounds. These bales actually have to be lifted up. Normally, you use your knee to help lift the bale up and throw it onto the hay wagon, and sometimes you had to lift it up higher. After doing that for a day — and my legs and arms were raw — I think my wife changed her mind about that as well.

I want to talk just for a couple of minutes on the branding party I went to, to give you some idea of what it's like to be a rancher. I got invited to a branding party. It's not drinking. Well, that came after, but this is where you rope the animals. You rope the calves.

I was given a rope, and I was sent into this area to rope some calves so we could brand them. The first time I threw a rope, I actually caught a steer. You have one of those big steers coming at you. I can remember dropping the rope and running very quickly away from it.

Finally, I got a chance to hold onto a calf that had been roped by somebody else. Now, I can remember holding onto that calf's hind legs. I watched them as they dehorned them by burning the tops of their heads where the horns normally come through. They then inoculated them. They wattled them by cutting a piece of their cheek and pulling it down and throwing dust on it to stop the bleeding so that in the wintertime you could identify your animals depending on where the wattle would come. It usually came from the cheek.

They then branded the animals. They actually branded them while I was holding the hind leg. Then they castrated them. They took a jackknife out, opened it with their teeth and castrated the animals and threw the remains on the ground.

Later on, after all this was done, we had a little bit of the heather, and we decided we were going to have prairie oysters. I didn't know what they were talking about, but we went back into the area where the castration had taken place. They picked up the stuff in the field, put it in a bucket and washed it off. After a little bit more of the heather, I had some of the prairie oysters.

An Hon. Member: I hope they were cooked.

D. MacKay: They were cooked, certainly, and they were very good.

Ranchers and their families have many challenges. They also have some good times, but they put in long, long days to put meat on our tables. I have to say that the meat that comes from the ranch is great, great meat. It's nice when you can buy it from a rancher, because they do a great job in providing wonderful meat for all of us.

H. Lali: I thank the hon. member.

To continue on, most important, those small plants, however inefficient, manage to pay farmers double what today's megaplants are paying.

I know it's not as exciting as the hon. member's speech just a few seconds ago, but getting back to what I have to say in my three minutes left, today packers and retailers are keeping all the financial benefits of efficiency and concentration. Corporate concentration has made packers and retailers more powerful. Farmers are getting less; packers and retailers are taking more.

Had packers and retailers continued to pass efficiency gains back to beef producers as they did in the '70s and '80s, farmers' prices today might be 50 to 60 bucks per hundredweight higher. Not only are there fewer plants, but there are fewer owners. More precisely, the dominant packers today own a greater share of total capacity. Ownership is more concentrated. There's a very strong correlation between increasing packer concentration and falling prices.

In addition to all of this, here in B.C. we've had our own challenges. Farmers and ranchers have always argued that the agricultural land reserve unfairly punishes them, especially unprofitable and marginal farmers. They argue that instituting the ALR without proper and sufficient supports from federal and provincial governments for making agriculture a viable enterprise is a recipe for failure.

As stated earlier all governments — Socred, NDP and Liberal — have contributed equally toward eroding financial supports for agriculture and ranching. The elimination of the Buy B.C. program; the federal government's meat industry regulation; the provincial carbon tax on gasoline, diesel, natural gas and heating oil; and population growth and urban sprawl are other major contributing factors seriously hurting the future viability and survival of ranching in B.C. and North America. Many ranchers all over B.C. are being forced to sell their ranches to dairy producers or are on the brink of bankruptcy.

[1050]

Ranchers are proud. They don't usually ask for help from government, but they are hurting, and they're asking for us to do something. On our side of the House the beef cattle industry is an important contributor to B.C.'s economy. We believe that. We want to work in partnership with the B.C. Cattlemen's Association to ensure the industry's future viability and also its growth. We also believe that government policies that create adverse challenges for the industry should be changed.

R. Thorpe: Give us an example.

H. Lali: Well, we'll get to that another time.

We will also act to support the beef industry by working for the transfer of the business risk transfer program from the federal government to the provinces with the assurance that federal funding would continue. We would also like to ensure that all tenure holders' rights are respected and secured by completely restructuring

the tenure system in order to break monopolies created by forest policies.

Any new system will also protect all existing tenure holders and will be implemented in full consultation with the B.C. Cattlemen's. We are also interested in working with the B.C. Cattlemen's to explore the possibility of a range development fund that would use range fees for range development.

As for the mountain pine beetle....

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

H. Lali: Thank you, hon. Speaker. I know that I ran out of time. At another opportunity I would like to expand upon that.

FLOOD PROTECTION

J. Les: This morning I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about flood protection in British Columbia, which, as all members of the House will know, is an extremely important topic, given the geography of our province. Many, if not most, of the people of the province live in lowland areas, in river valleys and on alluvial fans, and we are generally surrounded by high mountains which collect an awful lot of snow every winter — some winters more, some winters less. Nonetheless, there is a lot of snow that falls on our mountains around British Columbia.

Inevitably, as the spring weather and early summer weather comes, these snows melt and create what is called a spring freshet. In many years these spring freshets run off without any difficulty at all, but there are occasionally runoffs that cause a lot of problems. Actually, we have an obligation as governments, I think, to be ready for those, to plan for the worst so that our residents are protected.

We had a challenge almost two years ago now, in the spring of 2007, that really illustrated the severity of the runoff that can occur. We had very heavy snow that year. The spring was relatively cool, and then the warm weather came all at once. I'm wondering whether this year might not be, at least in some way, a replay of that, given that we've had very cool spring weather so far.

In any event, in 2007 we faced that challenge. We immediately put in place a \$33 million program that allowed us to do an awful lot of dike protection and raising dikes in many areas. We put in place a lot of riprap. We bought gabion weirs. Generally speaking, we did a lot of work to make sure that we protected the people in their communities.

To a large degree we were successful, although I am very aware that in some communities, particularly in the northwest, we still had some flooding issues to deal with. That's where our provincial emergency program took over and made sure that those people had the help that they needed.

That \$33 million that was spent in 2007, of course, is still in place today protecting communities. That was followed up with a \$140 million program that we championed and spearheaded and have now jointly funded with the federal government, \$140 million over seven years. That will be deployed across British Columbia in communities, making sure that our flood protection works are robust and remain so.

A lot of these flood protection structures need work from time to time as they become obsolete. I'm thinking particularly of some of the major pumping systems that we have in place. They do need considerable maintenance from time to time.

That kind of work is very important, but there's another aspect, as well, that's extremely important, and that is the issue of removing sediment and gravel that builds up in many of the rivers across the province. It is simply a fact that as the rivers flow, especially in the spring freshet, there's an enormous amount of energy that's released, and that takes an awful lot of sediment down with it.

[1055]

We have seen in a variety of rivers across the province, whether it's in Prince George or whether it's some of the areas in the Fraser River or the tributaries that feed the Fraser River, that the buildup of gravel can become an extreme risk in terms of exposing populations to flood hazards.

In conjunction with all of the other work that is being funded, we now have in place, with the federal government, a flood control program that also allows for gravel and sediment removal to facilitate better river flows. That work, of course, is not being done indiscriminately. That work is being done, first of all, with the thought in mind that we're enabling the carrying capacity of the river to at least be maintained, if not improved.

With that in mind, we employ river hydrologists and engineers to inform us where that material is best removed. We also employ environmental consultants and monitors to monitor the process, to make sure that any environmental risk is mitigated to the absolute extent possible.

I have watched a number of these programs in operation, particularly in the area that I represent on the Chilliwack reach of the Fraser River, where several of these projects have now been completed. I have been particularly pleased to see all of the care that is taken to protect the environment, to make sure that the fisheries resource is not adversely impacted in any way.

There was a project at Harrison Bar just a couple of weeks ago that was in full swing at that time, and this work, of course, is being deliberately done when there are no salmon in the river and when there's no spawning activity going on. I went back there again the day before yesterday, and the equipment is now out of the river. The

work is complete, and I would defy almost anyone to show where exactly this work happened. The restoration of the site has been, I think, very, very commendably done.

Of course, at that location now about 150,000 tonnes of gravel has been taken out of the river. That will improve the flow of the river at that point and slightly alter the current of the river so that it doesn't direct itself straight up the mouth of the Harrison River, as it did previously.

Hopefully, over time, that will result in a reduction in water levels at that location. That will be particularly beneficial for the farmers at Harrison Mills, who have had tremendous difficulty with seepage over the last several years, as the river seems to be continually increasing in elevation with the spring freshet.

We are not only protecting populations from being flooded, but we're also protecting the interests of farmers who carry on their activities alongside the rivers. If you have excessive seepage, then of course it becomes very difficult to work the land. If you can't work the land in the spring, your growing season is basically gone, and you're left with very little productive capacity in your land.

I'll carry on as soon as I hear from the member opposite.

M. Sather: Before I respond to some of the issues with regard to the efficacy or lack thereof of dredging the Fraser River, I want to say a little bit about the fisheries values in the lower reaches of the Fraser River — that is, the reach from Hope down to Mission. Up to ten million pink salmon spawn in the Fraser mainstream, which is the largest run of salmon in B.C., along with a million chum salmon. Also, there are coho, sockeye and chinook that migrate to the river every year.

The fact of the matter is that this section of the river is extremely important to fisheries. There are some 30 species of fish in the area, including the white sturgeon, which can grow to over six metres in length and over 150 years old. Mark Angelo of the Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C. said that this section of the Fraser from Mission to Hope may well be the most productive stretch of river in the world.

[1100]

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

We're talking about a part of the river that is extremely valuable as a fisheries resource and is susceptible to damage from dredging, as we saw at Big Bar a few years ago, in 2006, when salmon redds, the nests of the salmon, were dewatered by the activities related to a gravel removal operation, resulting in the loss of millions of salmon. Reports have it that there are a number of similar problems in other sections of the river.

The Herrling Island plan would take more than 50,000 truckloads of gravel out of the river. Dr. Marvin Rosenau

called this plan "the biological equivalent of running a D-9 cat down the centre of the spawning beds of the Adams River." The Adams River, of course, is the huge sockeye-spawning site upcountry. Those fish come up the Fraser River.

Dr. Rosenau was senior fisheries biologist at the Ministry of Environment before he was ousted by this government for standing up for conservation values. He is an authority on this subject and relates the importance and the sensitivity of this habitat to fisheries.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Now, the member for Maple Ridge–Mission actually had written in a letter not long ago that the riverbed at Chilliwack has risen 1.5 metres, with a loss of five feet of freeboard on the dike. That's not how it works. When you dig out a section of the river at a given location, you create a hole, which the water fills in, but it doesn't, in fact, have much bearing on the overall height of the river vis-à-vis the dikes.

I'll go on to mention, first of all, that the gravel committee that studied the Fraser found that on average the Fraser River levels were only five centimetres higher than 40 years ago. There's other objective evidence that I'll refer to that belies the idea that the Fraser River is filling up with gravel. It simply is not the case.

There was also a report by the Pacific Fisheries Resource Conservation Council saying that gravel deposited downstream from Agassiz is largely offset by erosion of silt and sand from the same area, resulting in a rough equilibrium, which would be borne out by the fact that the river has risen this small amount of five centimetres over the past 40 years.

The Northwest Hydraulic Consultants report, which came out not too long ago, says that dropping the riverbed by a metre in several locations would take 1.4 million cubic metres of sand and gravel — that's a lot of sand and gravel; that's a lot of fisheries habitat — out of the river but would only reduce the river level by five to 15 centimetres, so about two to six inches, and this would not have any significant effect on controlling flooding whatsoever.

So I think we need to be clear that there may be particular locations where there could be some benefit, but the benefit is far outweighed by the hyperbole.

J. Les: Well, here are the facts. We know from scientific work that's been done that in the average year on the Chilliwack reach of the Fraser River about 250,000 tonnes of gravel is washed into that reach of the river. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that over time, left undisturbed, that will lead to a buildup in that river, and we know that there has been a significant buildup since 1950 in that reach of the river.

Now, the member opposite suggested that the erosion of silt and sand from adjacent farmlands would tend to

compensate. Indeed, I have seen some significant erosion from places like Island 32 and Carey Point, where literally hundreds of acres of good, productive farmland have disappeared into the river. Those soils are probably now deposited somewhere around Delta or even further out into the Georgia strait. That is what happens when proper river management is not done.

[1105]

The work that is ongoing in terms of gravel removal is being very closely monitored. It is going ahead with the full approval of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. I would encourage all members of the House to read their screening report. They consistently say, depending on whatever aspect of those gravel and sediment removal operations is being undertaken, that the effect is benign and that where there is any impact at all, it is very quickly mitigated by the normal operation of the river.

So it is important. There is no question that it is important to look after the environmental values, but it is at least equally important, to ensure that we protect the public, to manage these rivers — not only the Fraser River but all of the rivers across the province — in a way that the safety of our populations is not compromised.

There is a balance here that we need to keep in mind. It is not fish or people, or people or fish. It is look after the fish and look after the people as well. That's what we're supposed to do as a responsible government: make sure that all of these interests are protected.

Hon. I. Chong: I now call private member's Motion 9.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 9 without disturbing the priorities of the motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

Motions on Notice

JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

C. Trevena: I move the private member's motion in my name on the order paper.

[Be it resolved that this House agree to apply the spirit of "Jordan's Principle" to ensure that children will be made the first priority when it comes to health and safety needs and that jurisdictional disputes are secondary to the health and welfare of children and families on reserve.]

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

Madam Speaker, Jordan's principle is just that. It's a principle. It was first moved in Ottawa in the House of Commons by Jean Crowder, the MP for Nanaimo-Cowichan, following the very sad death of a first nations

boy in Manitoba. The child had severe medical problems, and for far too long governments were squabbling over who would be paying to look after the boy, to look after his interests after he was going to leave hospital. Sadly, the child died before this was resolved.

Because of that — because of the very sad circumstances, which came down to an issue of jurisdictional squabbling — it was looked at that there had to be a statement of will that the needs of the child come first, that a child-first policy had to be developed.

This is what Jordan's principle is. It is a child-first policy. It is intended to look beyond the jurisdictional issues of first nations rights. When first nations are living on reserve, they are under the ambit of the federal government. But there are times when the needs are so urgent that we have to be looking beyond that and looking beyond who is responsible and saying that somebody has to take responsibility. At times that should be the provincial government.

I've got to say that we welcomed it on this side of the House when the Premier announced in the throne speech back in 2008 that he adopted Jordan's principle. It was going to be the first province in the country to accept Jordan's principle. It had passed a year earlier in the Commons, and the rights of the child were going to be put ahead of any squabbling that came from either side, whether it was from the federal government or the provincial government.

At that time the Premier said: "Your government will work with first nations and the federal government to put Jordan's principle into action and to strengthen services for aboriginal children and families." It was something that should have been welcomed. It was something that we welcomed on this side of the House, because we know that the needs are very pressing, extremely pressing, for many, many first nations families and very many first nations children.

It's something that should come under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Children and Family Development. That minister also supported Jordan's principle and has on a number of occasions lauded the fact that the government was the first province to accept Jordan's principle and work on Jordan's principle and said that this would allow aboriginal children to have "access to equitable services."

[1110]

I have raised in this House a number of times a perfect example of where we could use Jordan's principle, and that's the issue of substandard housing on first nations reserves. Children who live in substandard housing become sick. It's no question that living in a house that is covered with black mould — as there is in a number of the houses in the Tsulquate reserve north of Port Hardy and a number of other reserves, both in my constituency and around the province — is detrimental to the health of those children.

The levels of asthma are much higher than elsewhere, and really, a sick child is going to cost us in the province in terms of the health service and in terms of education. A child who goes to school sick isn't going to study as well. Particularly, a poor child who is likely often hungry and going to school sick is going to face greater problems.

This is a time that the government could step in and act on Jordan's principle. It could say: "We have such an issue of substandard housing, of this impacting children's health, that we are not going to wait for the federal government to come in. The federal government has the jurisdiction over reserves and reserve housing. We're not going to wait for them to come in. We're going to act now. We're going to sit down with first nations and work out a strategy to improve the housing conditions on reserve so that the kids aren't living in squalid, substandard, Third World conditions."

In fact, the Government House Leader and Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation has acknowledged that housing on reserve could be a time when we could use Jordan's principle. He said during the estimates process last year: "We can hide behind jurisdictional issues" — and I'm quoting from the estimates process, from *Hansard* — "but on-reserve housing improperly addressed becomes in many cases a health issue off of the reserve. The costs all accrue."

He went on to say: "Jordan's principle is about the fact that it's child first, safety first. Let's not get mired in jurisdictional disputes when the life or safety of a child is at stake." That was from the Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, who recognizes that Jordan's principle can apply when we're talking of substandard housing and that the fact of child safety, child health, has to come first, above jurisdictional disputes. This was just last year.

As I say, I raised the issue of the housing on reserve, on Tsulquate, in this House. I raised it in question period. I have written to the minister about this, in joint letters with colleagues from this side of the House to ministers, to try and get some response, to say: "Okay, we have a problem. Let's enact this very moral principle."

I was talking to the Chief just this last weekend, and still nothing has happened. This government has not acted on Jordan's principle in this case. This government has neglected the possibility of coming in and helping children by saying: "We're going to do something."

We're talking now of economic downturn. We're talking about shovel-ready projects. We're talking about getting things moving in the province.

What better way of getting things moving than engaging everybody for the benefit of children and sitting down with first nations, looking at on-reserve housing, and saying: "Okay, we as a province are going to do something. We as a province are going to act to ensure that the safety of children does come first and the health of children does come first. We're going to work

with you, and then we will work out who is responsible for the finances — whether the province will pay for it or the federal government will pay for it."

This is an issue of such importance and such urgency, and it's such a moral issue that we need to act now.

I will wrap up my comments on this note. Jordan's principle is a principle. It's not legislated. It's a good principle. It's a moral principle. It's the moral stand that we should be acting upon. I would hope that this government acknowledges that morality and does not just say the words but acts on it and does something to ensure that the health and safety of first nations children truly is looked after.

[1115]

R. Thorpe: Let me say on this motion, Motion 9, that British Columbia was the first province in Canada to endorse Jordan's principle. We have made a commitment to ensure that jurisdictional funding disputes don't get in the way of first nations children accessing health and social services that are available within their regions. Our government is honouring that commitment.

It is about all of our children. First and foremost, though, let's not forget how Jordan's principle emerged. The principle honours the memory of a boy from Norway House Cree Nation in northern Manitoba, where a funding dispute prevented him from leaving hospital to receive care in a family home.

Our government has taken action to ensure that such tragic cases do not happen in British Columbia. While such a tragic case has not happened here, we are using the principle today to further strengthen our strong practice whenever the responsibility for funding in available health or social services is unclear. It truly is about all of our children.

What progress have we made? Each of us in this House knows that the health and social services system for first nations involves both the provincial and the federal governments and about 200 first nations in British Columbia. Implementing Jordan's principle in B.C. has required an intensive collaboration effort.

Since endorsing it in January of last year, the Ministry of Children and Family Development has worked in partnership with first nations, the Ministry of Health Services, the Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, the Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, Health Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada to fully implement the first-child principle.

Today we are applying the child-first principle on a case-by-case basis to all health and social services available within each first nation's geographic area. The government of first contact ensures that the needs of the child come first, and the question of who pays the bills is sorted out later. To me it's always good to see how this is actually working in the field, on the ground, in serving those children that need our assistance.

Recently there was the case of a young child in care who had been in hospital with multiple health issues. The child was ready to leave the hospital. An extended-family member came forward, wanting to take the child's care. The family member faced some financial barriers due to the child's significant medical needs.

The Children and Family workers in the case consulted with the aboriginal community, medical professionals and community health care providers to facilitate and secure the funding for housing and the support services for the young boy's new caregiver and the child's medical needs.

The integrated case management approach resulted in a child who had lived all of his or her life in a hospital being able to live with an extended-family member. This is but one example of ways in which the ministry is acting in the spirit of Jordan's principle, by putting a child first.

The member for North Island talks about different issues, but one of the issues that the member has to actually come clean on in this House is why this member is against economic opportunity for first nations. She will talk here in this House about things, but when she's in her riding, she will talk a different tune.

I think it's important that we listen to the various chiefs who have commented on this, and one is Chief Ken Brown. Chief Brown says that the member for North Island "will appeal to her constituents who are already sadly thrown out of work in whatever latest mill or mine has collapsed due to the markets, and out of the other side of her mouth she talks a steady anti-development line."

There's one thing we can all actually agree on this House — that economic activity and economic opportunities for all is the best social network. So I think it's important for that member, when she returns to her constituency, to listen to the voices that are talking about the same thing we all want for our communities — the opportunity for economic opportunity, the opportunity to look after our children, the opportunity to educate our children.

Another chief, Chief Richard Harry, says: "My people ask only one thing of politicians in this process, and that is not to once again destroy our chance to provide for ourselves."

[1120]

You know, Madam Speaker, it is important that we all work together. Our government is working together with the federal government on housing issues, and members on that side of the House actually know that. We are working with the government of Canada. We were quite pleased with the federal budget of 2009 that reflects the priority the province put forward to Ottawa, which includes \$400 million for housing nationwide and \$515 million for urgent on-reserve infrastructure needs. That is what our government is doing working with the federal government.

So we are making progress. Is there more work to be done? Yes, there is. But surely what all members of this

House have to do is come together and understand that you cannot just argue about the social responsibilities, which we all accept. We also have to honour and respect those that want to help themselves with economic activity.

Let me just close here, if I could, by saying that Jordan's principle is in effect in British Columbia. The province continues to work with first nations and the federal government to better coordinate cross-jurisdictional service needs to support easier access to the complex systems of health and social services. Jordan's principle is only one piece of the province's broader commitment to build new relations with aboriginal people, founded on reconciliation, recognition and respect.

Deputy Speaker: I'd just like to remind members that members should refrain from indulging in remarks that negatively reflect on other individuals in the chamber. This is during private members' statements.

S. Fraser: Thank you, Madam Speaker. Being mindful of your last statement, I will, hopefully, not step over the line based on.... I have to comment on the last member's statement. All right.

I am pleased to be speaking to Jordan's principle today. I first started raising issues on Jordan's principle back in 2006. It was regarding a little girl in the community of Ahousat in Clayoquot Sound in Nuu-chah-nulth territory.

This little girl had a congenital problem known as Usher syndrome, a disease that progresses and causes breakdown in some systems. There are eye problems. There are health problems. A brilliant little girl who needed help and was not receiving any of the necessary medical treatment that she required. Neither was the family who was trying to deal with this. The support systems were not there and neither was the entire community of Ahousat.

Chief Keith Atleo came to me in this House, in this Legislature, in 2006, and I was able to raise this with the former Minister of Children and Families — I don't know if I can say his name — the deceased Stan Hagen. He did listen to what I talked about in trying to get assistance to this little girl and to others in the same situation.

The previous speaker suggested that this was not happening here — in B.C., I assume he meant — and that's part of the problem, sort of a denial that the children on reserve are falling through the cracks when it comes to interjurisdictional disputes. It is happening here; it is happening all over the country.

I would note that under this principle, where jurisdictional disputes arise between two government parties — provincial and territorial or federal — or between two departments or ministries of the same government regarding payment for services for a status Indian child, which are otherwise available to Canadian children off

reserve, the government or the ministry department of first contact must pay for the services without delay or disruption. The paying government party can then refer the matter of the jurisdictional dispute to other mechanisms. In this way the needs of the child get met first while still allowing for the jurisdictional dispute to be resolved.

[1125]

There was a case study done on this. It showed that jurisdictional disputes involving the costs of caring for first nations children are very prevalent, with 393 of these disputes occurring in 12 sample first nations and child and family service agencies this past year alone. The vast majority of these disputes were between, again, the federal government and the provincial government over jurisdiction of who should pay. And the child was suffering, the families were suffering and the first nations communities were suffering.

I would submit that this is not about economic development. This is about caring for children and putting children first. I will note that that is the position that the leadership council in this province states, and that is why the member for North Island was accurate in bringing this forward in this debate today.

The First Nations Leadership Council.... I'll cite some of their comments: "Jordan's principle involves a 'child-first' approach to resolving jurisdictional disputes regarding the provision of services to status Indian children. The principle supports a system where the government of first contact, whether provincial or federal, assumes primary economic responsibility for the child's health...."

That is not happening in this province. It's happening in a piecemeal way at best. But we are not alone in this province. This is happening across the country. I will give the Liberal government due here. They have acknowledged Jordan's principle, and they have stated their support for Jordan's principle.

What hasn't happened is anything tangible regarding Jordan's principle. The words came out, and I guess that's a good first step. What we haven't had is anything budgeted to deal with this. We haven't seen anything other than the platitudes put forward by the words of support.

This is about protecting children, our future generations. Children on reserve in this province and across the country deserve the same services and the same consideration that other children get, that are available to other children in the province and in the country, and that has not happened.

There are a lot of reasons for that. I suggest the Indian Act is part of that problem. I would suggest through that, the reservation system in this country is part of that problem. Other contributing factors such as residential school problems and the travesty of that dark part of our history are part of that problem.

But that's the past, and to deal with the present and the future is what this place is about. We must ensure that jurisdictional disputes between the federal and provincial governments do not make victims out of children on reserve.

I will cite some of the examples that the member for North Island, my colleague from North Island, rightly brought forward with housing issues: horrendous mould conditions on reserve, overcrowding — things like that. Unsafe conditions for children to grow up anywhere in this country, anywhere in the world, are happening in this province right next door to relatively affluent communities.

We cannot continue to look the other way. We have to deal with Jordan's principle because it is the right thing to do, to protect children and put children first. It is, I submit, a level of our civilization and a rating of our civilization as to how well we do with that.

But there are other reasons. The member for Okanagan-Westside did cite economic activity, but there are economic benefits to doing the right thing for children on reserve. If the federal government doesn't put forward the right resources to deal with atrocious Third World housing conditions on reserve, then the costs of that, I would submit, are borne.... Well, of course, the costs in misery and suffering are borne by the child first and foremost, and the first nations communities and the families involved certainly.

[1130]

But in a cross-economic example the costs of a child acquiring health problems, because of substandard conditions because some level of government didn't provide proper housing, for instance, are borne by the province. The province is in charge of health care, the last I looked in this province. The cost of children and families administration is the cost of the province.

If a child from, say, North Island, from a Port Hardy reserve or from a Nuu-chah-nulth reserve develops childhood asthma and has an asthma attack and must be medevacked to the closest hospital, which is often geographically far, the costs of all of that are borne provincially.

You cannot separate out provincial and federal responsibility, and that is the wisdom of Jordan's principle. It says: "Put the child first." Whichever government is given the attention of a problem happening on reserve, that government should deal with the problem and fight out the jurisdictional disputes at another time.

If it is a federal responsibility, then I would suggest the federal government has a constitutional responsibility to deal with that. They're not dealing with it. The province, if they know there's a problem, should step in and fix that problem and send the bill to the federal government and, if need be, duke it out in court on a constitutional neglect issue by the federal government.

But to just say it's a federal issue and then wash your hands of it is a dereliction of the duty to the people of

this province and the first nations in this province and, more importantly, to the children of this province. All children deserve to be treated with respect and be given the dignity and the ability to grow up in a safe environment, in a healthy environment.

And if we allow that to happen, if we allow not just the words of Jordan's principle but the actual meaning and the tangible reality of Jordan's principle to exist in this province, then we are making it better for future generations. We will make this place a better place to live for children, which is a better thing for our future because the children of this province are our future.

J. Nuraney: The motion before us this morning, brought forward by the member for North Island, is a motion on which one can speak many words. Jordan's principle was the result of a very unfortunate incident that took place in Manitoba, when a young child, Jordan Anderson, faced an untimely death. That death came because of the wranglings of the different bureaucracies and the spheres of influence and the responsibility of different governments.

It's sad. It's very sad that a person, a child, had to lose his life because different governments could not come to some kind of clarity as to whose responsibility it was to take care of that child. In my opinion, this also highlights some of the fundamental problems, the fundamental injustices that the first nations people have suffered and gone through over the years.

I have on several occasions spoken about this in this House — that we, the citizens of Canada.... If there was or there is a stain on our citizenship, that stain is the neglect of the first nations people who live amongst us. Jordan's principle, when it came to light.... I'm glad to say that our government in British Columbia was the first provincial government to adopt that principle.

[1135]

They saw that not just as a principle of putting the child first. It is the very basis of this government's ethic. Ever since we became government in 2001, we have established this focus that whatever we do, it is a person, it is a human being who is the centre of our attention and our efforts.

When we talk about health care, we talk about the patient first. When we talk about education, we talk about the student first. In this case, I'm glad that this government rose up to the challenge and embraced this principle of what is called Jordan's principle.

First nations people need our help in various different forms — health care, education, housing, social ailments and the whole structure — the way the community is now facing all different kinds of challenges. It is the responsibility of all levels of government — the federal, the provincial and even at times municipal — to come forward to address and help solve these problems so that the members of the first nations can enjoy a life of opportunity, dignity and justice.

I, once again, support this motion. I would like to say that Jordan's principle is a principle of ethic, and I fully support this.

L. Krog: I sometimes have thought that one of the best things we could teach young people in our educational system is about how the constitution of this country works and how the division of powers works, because perhaps if more people were familiar with how that operates, they might rise up and demand some fundamental changes.

If you're a six-year-old aboriginal child with serious issues, guess what. You don't care whether it's a federal responsibility or a provincial responsibility. You don't care whether it's your parents' responsibility. You just know that there's a problem that needs solving. Indeed, I think that principle applies to many voters generally.

David Zirnhelt, who sat in this House for a number of years, was much maligned for making a very off-the-cuff remark about how you could do anything, basically. What he was talking about was that within the jurisdiction, this Legislature can pass any law it wants, and he was right. He was absolutely right. We have the power, within our constitutional jurisdiction, to do whatever we want as long as it doesn't breach the Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

But he said something to me privately once, too, and I'll paraphrase it lest I offend anyone. He said that if people knew how g.d. hard it was to make anything happen around here.... I suspect that was in a guarded moment after trying to get something through cabinet, and it reflected the frustration of a man who, I believe, cared deeply about his constituents, about his portfolio and about his province. I think that's what brings most of us here. We want to make something happen. We actually want to improve the lives of British Columbians.

Now, we may fight and argue about what, in particular, it is we're going to do — and we have vast philosophical differences — but we are all agreed in this chamber this morning that it is a horrendous indictment of our failure as politicians and political leaders across this country that my good friend Jean Crowder would ever have had to introduce a motion in the federal House to deal with something called Jordan's principle.

If we cannot get our act together to deliver services to a group that has been marginalized historically, has been discriminated against in a way that is almost hard to accept and believe....

I want to remind the members of this chamber that when the South African government wanted to set up the apartheid system, they sent representatives to Canada to look at our reserve system. That's a historical fact. They came to Canada to figure out how to set up the reserve system, set up their apartheid system. It was a great model for them. So I think, around this particular issue, if there is ever a need for non-partisanship and a need to do the right thing, it is around the concept of Jordan's principle.

[1140]

It is time — and I say this in a completely non-partisan way — we all got our act together, both at a federal and a provincial level, to ensure that it's never necessary for a Member of Parliament to have to stand up and ask for a motion, nor is it necessary for a member of this assembly to raise this for discussion here this morning.

We can do and should do a better job. Children are vulnerable. It is our duty to care for them.

R. Lee: Thank you for the opportunity given to me to talk about this Jordan's principle. We all know that Jordan's principle applies to a situation case by case. Also, this is a child-first approach whenever there's uncertainty or dispute over which level the services should be provided. Then the principle is saying that the care of the child comes first and a settlement of the payment comes later. Then people can sort out which level of government is responsible for the payment.

We know that this principle has been applied case by case. The example I heard is that there's a group of aboriginal youth who were at high risk of suicide as well, due to alcohol, drug and problems. This issue happened about a year ago. The band came together, indicating that it had no resource for helping the youth. So the agency contacted the Ministry of Children and Families. They also assisted the band to host a meeting with the federal government, the health authority, the local school districts, the local delegated agency and also a local non-profit agency, all together.

They worked together to have an integrated approach to solve this problem. This is a very integrated team together. The outcome of this meeting was a joint agreement with all the parties to begin to implement the aboriginal suicide and crisis response team in that area. This is a good approach, people working together in partnership to solve a specific problem.

As well, all parties were working with the aboriginal community to implement a systematic early intervention approach because of this meeting, and to identify and assist aboriginal youth at risk in general.

The original working group is still working right now as we are speaking. So it's working in a case-by-case principle.

This Jordan's principle is invoked when funding is not clear. It's not clear which jurisdiction should take care of the payment. So this is a principle on the principle. It's that if this is unclear, then this Jordan's principle will be applied. It does not apply when the jurisdiction is clear, as in the case of the federal responsibility for on-reserve housing. On-reserve housing is a challenge.

Although this principle is not being applied on housing, the province is obviously doing its part to help in the aboriginal housing. The province has actually recognized that quality housing has remained out of reach for many first nations people and that inadequate housing creates an unhealthy situation for children.

What the province has done.... The province has taken concrete steps to address the housing problem facing many, many aboriginal citizens living both on and off reserve. In fact, in May 2008, B.C., Canada and the First Nations Leadership Council signed an MOU to work together to develop a comprehensive approach to improve housing for first nation communities. While this work continues, progress has been made to support off-reserve aboriginal housing as well.

I know my time is up. I would like to say that in this province, we support Jordan's principle, and we are proud to be the first province to support this principle.

[1145]

N. Simons: It gives me pleasure to speak in favour of this motion as well. I thank my colleagues on both sides of the House who have spoken eloquently in some cases on this issue.

Really, what's facing us, what this issue is speaking about, is a question of inequality, a question of jurisdictional disputes that need to be resolved in the best interests of the child. I remember working on reserve, where my boss was the chief in council. I had to follow the legislation of the province in order to get funded by the federal government, and the jurisdictional confusion that that resulted in was always to the detriment of the first nations governing agency. So that was the issue that we had before us.

We had children who came to us who needed a particular diagnosis or perhaps treatment, and it was the first nation that was left holding the bag, because they would go to the provincial government and say: "We need this for our child." They would go to the federal government, and the provincial government would be arguing: "Well, that's their responsibility."

It was the first nations agency that represents about 90 percent of the first nations in British Columbia, represented by child welfare agencies in this province, who was left with the problem to deal with — the problem being how to fund the care that this child needs.

I find it kind of difficult to imagine how a government that claims to be working towards the use of Jordan's principle at the same time cuts the very department in the Ministry of Children and Families, for example, that tries to deal with these issues. I think that what the people of British Columbia need to realize is that it's nice to espouse a principle, and it's important to speak to the importance of that principle, but more important than both of those things is to actually allow that principle to be implemented.

I think that until children on reserve have the same access to services, whether they're diagnosis or treatment or placement afterwards, until they have the same ability to access those services as children wherever they are in the province, then we have that inequality. That needs to be addressed with more than words, with more than lofty goals. They need to actually be put into practice.

I agree that we need to look at issues about economic development, but let's face the fact that economic development in this province is not going to happen completely across the board at the same rate.

We do have some first nations who have managed to go into partnership and do well with providing resources to their community, and I applaud them. There are other bands around this province who may not have the economic base that is necessary, and we need to make sure that we do not go into a social deficit by not providing that care and that service to those children.

I'd like to applaud not just Jean Crowder, not just my colleagues in this House and the government for participating in this need to apply Jordan's principle, but also Kelly MacDonald, a first nations lawyer here in British Columbia who did amazing work on this and who pushed this issue as hard and as strongly as she could and was very successful. As well, Cindy Blackstock, who is the national executive director of the first nations caring society and a former colleague of mine.

I'd like to applaud those two individuals in particular, the people who have put pressure on government, that the government listen, that we do need to deal with the inequalities that exist.

With that, I'm pleased to support this motion.

R. Hawes: Thank you to the member for North Island for raising this issue.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

You know, we've heard quite a bit about what happened in Manitoba, and the government has listened, and we have adopted Jordan's principle. In British Columbia we are applying the principle to all health and social services available within any child's geographic region on a case-by-case basis.

One of the things we've done as a government is tried to build partnerships. One of the most important things that can happen when you have interjurisdictional differences is to build partnerships where you work together collaboratively. I'm quite proud of this government's record in a number of areas where we have begun working with the federal government, with local governments and with first nations governments to ensure that services are delivered on an equal basis as much as possible throughout our province.

[1150]

It is through the building of those partnerships and by acting in a collaborative way that we have progress. I think all of us recognize that there is only one taxpayer. So trying to have an interjurisdictional fight, where services go wanting for someone, really serves no one. That's why we do act in such a collaborative way with other levels of government.

Jordan's principle is in effect in British Columbia. It is not something that's been in effect for a lot of years. I think that's been acknowledged here, and a number of members have spoken about the fact that in the past there have been these kinds of disputes. It's unfortunate. But today those disputes, I think, are not happening. Certainly, if something arises, there is a mechanism for people who have this problem to seek relief.

To start with, anyone who has a problem or inquiries about the child-first principle can e-mail to Jordans.Principle@gov.bc.ca, or telephone inquiries can go to the Ministry of Children and Family Development, client relations branch. It's toll-free at 1-877-387-7027. People who are having a problem, if there are problems out there, can certainly call those numbers and, hopefully, get some answers.

One of the members previously said that this is not an economic development problem and also said that there is no money in a budget for Jordan's principle. Well, the fact is that we are looking at the budgetary impacts of implementing Jordan's principle, but right now the government believes that the budgetary impacts are not that great. At the moment, there are not very many cases that this would apply to that have been identified. But this is something that is being watched and, if necessary, will certainly find its way into future budgets.

In terms of an economic development issue, though, I am reminded that several years ago Andrew Larder, one of the provincial health officers, said to the Standing Committee on Health, as it toured the province, that we as a people spend more time pulling people out of the river than we do stopping them from falling in, in the first place. That's, I think, a really important thing to think about here.

One of the problems that we've got with first nations... We all recognize that life in first nations communities has lagged far behind the rest of the people in this country and that the problems that kids on reserves have really are mostly due to economic circumstance. If we can build the economic base on which those families operate and live, certainly a lot of those problems are going to look after themselves. We're going to stop these kids from having the kinds of problems that would require the disputes Jordan's principle calls for.

I think a big part of it is, then, stopping them from falling in the river in the first place, stopping the kinds of problems that poverty, etc., cause within families. We are working hard to do that, and part of that is with the types of partnerships that are being built between first nations communities and free enterprise on things like run-of-the-river projects that I think many first nations in this province are benefiting from greatly.

There are forestry partnerships. There are a number of partnerships that now are beginning to take place across our province that will build an economic base that I think will improve life within families through all first nations in this province. But this is not a thing that happens over-

night. It is, though, a thing that is happening. I think the steps that are being taken are showing great progress.

I just have one more quote here, if I can find it. I can't see it here, so I'm just going to close by saying that I know that many of the first nations that are working hard with government to improve life within their people are very much in tune with building the partnerships that build economic and prosperous futures for all of their people. That, again, stops the need for us to be talking about Jordan's principle. Again, I thank the member for bringing it, and I hope everyone realizes this is something that we are already doing.

[1155]

C. Wyse: I will be very brief, noting the hour. I do wish to voice my support for Jordan's principle. It is an issue that had been raised in the Cariboo by first nations. I was in the process of bringing this item forward here in the House.

Before that was needed, the Premier of the province did announce the support of the government for that principle. I wish to acknowledge the government for their actions on that. It is a principle that needs to be acted on, not on a case-by-case basis but on the fact that it is a principle, that when the conditions arise, the principle is applied, regardless of what the situation is — not on case by case, but the principle is implemented.

In order to do such, that requires that there must be the support found within the budget to do that. The ministry that has been identified by the government is the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The observation that I make is that that particular ministry once more has had its funding reduced.

So it falls on all of us to make sure that we live up to the principle that everyone in this House has spoken in favour of and that the resources are provided to actually put the principle into place.

C. Wyse moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. I. Chong: I thank all the private members for their comments this morning — a good debate.

Hon. I. Chong moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:57 a.m.

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