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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 30, 2009

The House met at 10:03 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

### Orders of the Day

#### Private Members' Statements

##### BURNABY

**R. Lee:** I rise today to celebrate and to recognize my riding of Burnaby North and the city of Burnaby, whose motto is "By sea and river rise Burnaby."

There have been many great changes in Burnaby over the past eight years, and I'm proud of the work that this government has done to help Burnaby rise to even greater heights. I am also very grateful for the opportunity to help the people of my riding, Burnaby North, which for me is the greatest joy of being an MLA.

[1005]

As a member of this government, I have been able to do more to help the residents of my riding, and of Burnaby as a whole, than I ever thought would be possible before I was elected.

[K. Whittred in the chair.]

Before getting into the specific benefits that have come to Burnaby North, it's important first to mention the economy. Every member of this House is very familiar with the fact that since 2001 this government has worked with great diligence and discipline to restore British Columbia's economic health after the lost decade of the '90s. An important aspect of our efforts to rebuild B.C.'s economy and make our province stronger than ever is the fact that we have very deliberately worked to diversify in terms of our export markets.

In the past we were overly reliant on the American markets for our exports, but over the past few years we have reduced that dependency by greatly expanding our presence in Asia. I had the pleasure of helping with this important work of diversifying our economy. In 2005 I was appointed the Parliamentary Secretary for the Asia-Pacific Initiative.

By bringing B.C.'s economy back to life, we have created thousands of jobs across the province and in my own riding of Burnaby North. Our renewed economic strength has also led to increased revenues for our province, allowing us to invest in programs and services of great benefit to British Columbians.

Here are some of the ways that Burnaby North and the rest of Burnaby have benefited over the past eight years.

In Burnaby there are seven schools slated to receive seismic upgrades: Chaffey-Burke Elementary, Edmonds Community School, Caribou Hills Secondary, Brantford Elementary and three others in Burnaby North — Capitol Hill Elementary, Douglas Road Elementary and of course Gilmore Elementary as well. We are also building new schools needed to serve our growing community — for example, the new school planned for the UniverCity development on Burnaby Mountain.

This government is also committed to rebuilding schools. In Burnaby, Burnaby Central Secondary School will be replaced much to the excitement of parents, students and, of course, staff. All told, we are improving the comfort and safety of our students while creating jobs at a time when every job counts.

Community supports — important what this government has done to support the community groups as well. An excellent example is the \$100,000 in gaming revenues recently awarded to Marguerite Dixon Transition Society. I am very happy that our support is continuing. This grant will do much to help the Marguerite Dixon Transition Society to continue their great work on behalf of abused women and their children. A previous grant of \$100,000, as well, was received in 2008 for the first phase of the project.

Every year in the area of \$50 million goes to transition house services, safe homes and second-stage housing, counselling and outreach.

The provincial government also knows how hard municipalities work to deliver services to people, and that's why in November of 2008 Burnaby received more than \$842,000 in lieu of property taxes. This grant demonstrates the B.C. Liberal government's ongoing commitment to support the community. We are providing additional resources to help pay for local services which are important to the residents of Burnaby. I was very pleased to see that this year's grant increased by 10 percent.

[1010]

Only ten short days ago I was with my fellow Burnaby MLAs to announce that the provincial government is increasing our investment. We are investing \$2.9 million in Burnaby for public safety initiatives, planning for improved water and sewer infrastructure, and enhancing local green spaces. The province provided the city of Burnaby with \$50,000 in 2008 to pursue twinning opportunities in Asia.

It is investments like these that keep our province at the forefront of the international market. This opportunity is consistent with the objective of establishing British Columbia as the internationally recognized North American capital for Asia-Pacific commerce and culture.

There is simply too much good news in Burnaby to share with members in seven short minutes. However, due to recent misleading statements by some of the members opposite, I want to highlight what we have done for the arts in our city. This government has shown strong and consistent support for the arts since 2001, including the \$150 million invested in 2008.

**R. Chouhan:** I understand that the member for Burnaby North is stuck in time. Every time he stands up, he still talks about the '90s. He's afraid to talk about the last eight years because he's afraid that people will know and talk about what has happened or has not happened in the last eight years in British Columbia.

I understand that an election is around the corner. A member has to stand up and make himself look like he's doing something. But you know, the example of him doing not anything in Burnaby is very obvious.

Recently we have this issue of the prison....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, may I remind you that the spirit of private members' statements is that they are non-partisan.

**R. Chouhan:** Madam Speaker, this is the member who started attacking the NDP in the '90s. I understand. I'm just responding to it.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, please be cautioned.

**R. Chouhan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll keep that in mind, but you know, it's my responsibility to respond to what he stated.

Let's talk about Burnaby. Let's celebrate Burnaby. Burnaby is a very diverse community. Over 100 languages are spoken in Burnaby. We have a very diverse population. We have anywhere from Afghanistan to Zanzibar — people who would love to live in Burnaby. They come and live there despite the fact the government hasn't done anything to help them.

We have a need for people for ESL training and settlement services. They have been struggling, and they're still struggling. The government has done nothing to support those people. We have seniors. You know, seniors in Burnaby are very tenacious. They are very hard-working. They have done so all their lives to support the community, to support this province. Now that they needed support for a seniors wellness program, they couldn't get it. I'm disappointed to say that this member didn't do anything to help those seniors as well.

We have long-term care facilities like New Vista. New Vista is a wonderful place, and they have been helping and supporting seniors since 1954. Now they need help to fill 12 empty beds that they have. They haven't filled them, because they are not getting those residents to New Vista. Has this member done anything? I don't think so. Or have the other three Liberal MLAs done anything...

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, Member.

**R. Chouhan:** ...to support New Vista? They haven't done it.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, order. Order.

Member, I've cautioned you twice. Private members' statements are an opportunity to exchange ideas in a non-partisan way without attacking members.

[1015]

**R. Chouhan:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I'll keep that in mind.

I think it's my responsibility to respond to the talk he was talking about earlier — what he has done for Burnaby. The reality is — and the facts speak for themselves — this government has done nothing for Burnaby. They're just desperately trying to make it look like they have done it. However, people know. They can't be fooled with their fast talk.

In Burnaby we need more funding for housing. Housing is a critical situation. We need money for that. We need money to support children. In British Columbia child poverty is the highest, and Burnaby is no exception.

Even though we don't have a courthouse in Burnaby, the government is trying to put a prison there. This member did not stand up and support the citizens of Burnaby, especially Burnaby North.

The only person who stood with them was Mondee Redman, who is our candidate from Burnaby-Edmonds. This woman has worked hard, going around and talking to people, meeting every day. She's the kind of leader we need in Burnaby North. I'm sure that on May 12, Mondee Redman will be our MLA.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member. Member.

**R. Chouhan:** Thank you. I appreciate that.

**R. Lee:** In response, actually, we have ESL programs, increased funding and also settlement workers in school to help new immigrants to settle in Burnaby and other places in British Columbia. Also....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, I caution you with the same caution as the previous member. Private members' statements are a non-partisan exchange of ideas. This is not the place where we contest the election. Continue, Member.

**R. Lee:** The opposition, naturally, are desperate to continue their fear campaign, even though the mayors of Metro Vancouver will select a location for a much-needed new pretrial centre. They are desperate to distract Burnaby residents from the most important issue right now, which is the economy. They know that when it comes to sound economic management, they have nothing to offer.

They ran eight consecutive deficit budgets, and that scares British Columbians. They know that even now, in the middle of a global economic crisis, unemployment in B.C. is lower than it was when they were in power.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, sit down, please.

Members, I repeat once again that the spirit of private members' statements is a non-partisan exchange.

Now please continue in that mode, Member.

**R. Lee:** I believe a lot of people in Burnaby are concerned about the economy. The record shows that those are the facts — the facts we cannot deny. From 1992 to 2000 the real GDP per person increased all over Canada by 21.8 percent — those are the facts — while B.C. was dead last in the country — only by 5.7 percent. The second last in the country was Nova Scotia. Nova Scotia was at 16.6 percent at that time — for the whole decade — almost three times B.C.'s miserable growth during that decade.

We had become a have-not province during that period. During a worldwide economic boom at that time, they failed to advance the budget, and they failed to maintain B.C. as an economic leader in Canada. No wonder the opposition doesn't want to talk about the economy. If they talk about that, they know that — Burnaby included — all the residents are affected. A lot of residents from Burnaby actually left.

[1020]

#### THE ALBION FERRY

**M. Sather:** It looks like we're going to have a spirited week ahead of us.

On June 2, 1957, was the first sailing of the *T'Lagunna*, the first Albion Ferry, which had been planned since 1924. It took some time to bring it about. The ferry was popular from the beginning. I'm told that riding across the Fraser in the picturesque Albion Ferry was the most romantic event that the province had to offer in the '50s.

In 1978 a second ferry, the *Klatawa*, was added. In 1985 the *T'Lagunna* was retired and the *Kulleet* was brought in. The *Klatawa* and *Kulleet* sail to this day. Also in 1985 the *Klatawa* became the first passenger-carrying vessel in the world to run on an alternate fuel, in this case natural gas.

The Albion Ferry was originally owned and operated by the Ministry of Transportation and Highways inland ferry department as part of the major road network. In 1999 the Albion Ferry was devolved to TransLink. By 2006, 1.5 million vehicles and over four million passengers used the ferry.

In the summer the ferry is heavily used by tourists. In fact, they provide the largest ridership. Loss of tourism dollars to Maple Ridge and Fort Langley will be considerable if the ferry is shut down, as is currently planned.

The ferry is a significant employer, and the money stays in the community. Some 58 full-time employees and 20 auxiliary staff will lose their jobs, and few of them have been able to get another position with TransLink. More than 100 small businesses on both sides of the

river will have their client base negatively affected as there is a tremendous amount of commerce back and forth between Langley and Maple Ridge over that ferry.

The Albion Ferry also acts as a quasi emergency response team, attending many marine accidents. Just this spring, for example, ferry staff rescued a man whose boat was overturned in the Fraser River.

Over 5,000 petitions have been signed to save the ferry, and they're still coming in. Even with the opening of the Golden Ears bridge, the Albion Ferry provides the most direct and efficient way for people from Albion and Whonnock to reach the mid-valley on the south side of the Fraser. Plus, it will cost them an additional \$10 to \$12 per day to take the bridge. By not having to drive all the way around to the Golden Ears bridge, there would be significantly fewer greenhouse gases produced as well.

Retired Capt. Graham Mowatt and current Capt. Clayton Phare have come up with a well-thought-out plan to keep one of the two boats running. However, the government has not met with this group wanting to run the ferry. The impending ignominious end to the Albion Ferry has been imprinted in the minds of many residents by seeing their beloved ships being put up for sale on Craigslist.

At the 50th anniversary of the ferry in June 2007 the member for Maple Ridge–Mission said he was in favour of retaining the Albion Ferry. However, despite many attempts, Captain Phare was unable to obtain a meeting with the member.

The member has said that if the communities want it and there is a will to do it, he would support that. Maple Ridge council has voted unanimously in favour of retaining the ferry, so I'm hopeful there will be some assistance coming from the government side. At this point I'm not too confident about that.

However, I'll take my seat and wait for comments from the member on the government side.

**R. Hawes:** This is kind of an interesting little discussion.

I want to go back in history just a tad. In the mid-'90s Maple Ridge was part of the Dewdney-Alouette regional district. In fact, I served with the then council from Maple Ridge, as I was on the Mission council, on the regional district.

[1025]

They made a decision in the mid-1990s to move from the Dewdney-Alouette regional district into the GVRD. With that, they took on the responsibilities that all GVRD members have to pay their fair share for the costs of running the GVRD.

In the late '90s the GVRD met with the then government and made a deal that they would take over all transportation in return for the government taking back all hospital debt from all of the regional hospital districts. In future the usual 40 percent capital contribution that was required for hospital

expansion and for health care — small equipment, etc., in hospitals — would no longer have to be paid.

Outside of the GVRD the hospital debt continues to require the 40 percent contribution.

They formed TransLink to take on the transportation part of this. Part of that, then, was the Albion Ferry. It became purely and simply a TransLink operation, not a provincial government operation. When the new bridge was moving ahead — which is a TransLink decision and is a TransLink project — TransLink made the decision to shut down the Albion Ferry.

I know that there's a lot of consternation and a lot of wishes to keep the ferry going. I've been approached many times by Captain Phare and others to do what I could do to keep the ferry going, and I have said repeatedly that I would support keeping the ferry going, providing that TransLink makes the decision that they want to keep it. They need to make that decision by first having the outright support of both Maple Ridge and Langley.

Maple Ridge has said they would support seeing the ferry continuing, providing it does not cost one cent to the taxpayers of Maple Ridge. They don't want to contribute any money, and TransLink has said they're not going to support financially the operation of the ferry.

Langley, to my knowledge, has said that they really don't want to see the ferry continue to run. The ferry slip on the other side of the river, on the Langley side of the river, my understanding is, is on land that the Kwantlen band says is their land, and they don't want that ferry slip there. So there are some very big problems.

There has been a business plan put forward by some of the staff on the boats to keep one boat running. They have done a number of petitions, as the member for Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows says. However, my experience with petitions is that if you ask people to sign something, to have a service that's costing them nothing or they perceive as nothing, everyone signs. But if it's going to cost people something, in their tax base or otherwise, sometimes they rethink that.

I'm not so sure that the petitions that are out there really convey the true cost or meaning of keeping this ferry going. I do know that when you listen to the radio every day and you hear a five-sailing wait at the Albion Ferry, etc., I'm pretty sure that most of those people would rather take the bridge and not have to wait in line at all.

I'm not sure that the projections for keeping the ferry going are as realistic as some portray them to be. But without local support — and local support also means, then, financial support — I don't see how the government can become involved.

Now, I would be happy to lobby the relevant minister about keeping the ferries themselves, the infrastructure, if the money to run this thing was being put up by local governments through TransLink rather than selling the boats off. But at the moment the boats are being sold, and I think they're being sold by TransLink.

The local governments then need, because they are voting members, to lobby TransLink, their own organization, in order to keep this service going. This is not a provincial government responsibility. It was traded off in the late 1990s.

I happen to live in a community that actually still pays the hospital debt. We didn't make a deal. So we are not responsible where I live for the transportation part, but we are for the hospital part. It's a very complex arrangement that isn't quite as simple as saying: "Let the government do everything — the provincial government."

[1030]

**M. Sather:** Well, it's interesting that the government is saying now: "Well, it's TransLink." This is what they say nowadays. "It's TransLink. It's TransLink." It's not their responsibility. But of course this government has taken over the operation of TransLink, the overall overseeing of TransLink, so of course they have responsibility for the operation of it. The member may want to wash his hands of that, but that's the case.

There is strong support for continuance of the ferry or, at least, the opportunity to run it privately. When I collected hundreds of signatures on a petition and people knew that there would be a toll, they were okay with that. But TransLink has told Captain Mowatt that shutting the ferry was a condition of the builder of the Golden Ears bridge.

The Albion Ferry is another victim of this government's privatization agenda. The inflated cost of the Golden Ears bridge as a result of privatization meant that there could be no competition for the bridge. That is why our ferry is going to die in three months, unless this government changes their mind.

The Minister of Transportation refuses to discuss the ferry with the community and hasn't responded to my letter either. I think the government is going to have to be facing this question in the weeks ahead. I don't think the results reflect well on their decisions.

#### BUILDING FOR TODAY AND THE FUTURE

**D. Hayer:** These are economically troubling times, and actions instead of words have to prevail today. Our government is stepping up to ensure the economy remains robust so that the future stays strong and British Columbia will be better placed to weather the economic storm that has engulfed the world.

We are fortunate in this province that for the past eight years we have had a government in place that has prepared for this economic downturn. In fact, one of the first acts this government did was to slash the provincial income tax because we know that in both good times and bad times the one who is best equipped to look after their money is the individual taxpayer. Putting more money into their pockets means they can save for a rainy

day, as we are facing today, or they can spend it to keep the economy going.

In fact, people earning less than \$116,000 per year will pay the lowest provincial income taxes in Canada in British Columbia today. Those earning less than \$15,500 will pay no provincial income tax at all. We have also eliminated income tax for over 250,000 low-income British Columbians. Through retroactive income tax cuts, this government has given an additional \$144 million back to British Columbians. And for small business and corporations, we have the lowest income taxes in Canada.

That is building an economy for today and for the future — an economy where more people have more money, more ability to buy, more ability to save and more ability to create prosperity that will improve their lives and the lives of their family members. And nowhere in British Columbia are those economic improvements and investments in our future being felt more than in Surrey.

My city of Surrey and my constituency of Surrey-Tynehead are secure in the planning this government has done. They are benefiting enormously from investments in every aspect of their lives for today and for the future.

We are building hospitals, building bridges, widening freeways, building roads, opening underpasses, extending SkyTrain, adding buses, building schools, opening universities and adding hundreds of new homes for seniors and beds for the homeless. We are creating jobs, improving the environment and securing both today's prosperity and for the future. That is building for today and for the future.

Surrey will be the largest city in the province. It already is among the largest cities in the country, and we are building for that growth while also preparing for those who live in Surrey today.

Construction has already begun on the new \$239 million out-patient hospital for ambulatory day care at Fraser Highway and 140th Street. This 148,000 square foot hospital will provide extended health care access for Surrey residents, and it is creating 1,500 construction jobs.

[1035]

We are building a new \$650 million critical care tower at Surrey Memorial Hospital, which will create 3,760 jobs and add 151 acute care beds, in addition to 73 new acute care beds opened in August 2008. This new tower will expand many services, including 48 children's neonatal intensive care beds and specialized mental health and geriatric units.

In addition, this new tower at Surrey Memorial Hospital will house a new emergency department that will be five times larger than the existing facility. It will include a separate children's ER and enhanced minor treatment unit. The new tower will also have a rooftop helipad for rapid emergency response.

Throughout the province this government, this year and next, will spend an estimated \$15.7 billion on health care. That's an increase of 68 percent since 2001. Plus, over the next three years, \$2.5 billion will be invested

in capital spending, new construction and renovations to health care facilities. That is building for today and for the future.

For Surrey's future residents, the children of tomorrow, that will also mean a new maternity department with 13 new birthing beds, private rooms for mothers and their families and additional academic space for the new doctors, nurses and other health care professionals, in partnership with the UBC medical school and Fraser Health.

Also at Surrey Memorial Hospital is a \$10 million expansion of the kidney dialysis unit, increasing the stations from 18 to 30. Plus, Surrey Memorial is undergoing a \$30 million upgrade initiative that began in 2005, which will build even more capacity, expand services and ease congestion. These additional beds represent a 26 percent increase in acute care beds in Surrey — 491 of them — since our government created Fraser Health.

For those facing the terrible disease of cancer, some \$12.5 million in renovations are being undertaken at the B.C. cancer centre in Surrey, vastly improving the services to cancer patients throughout our community.

We are building for today and for the future with this, as we invest in transportation infrastructure. The benefit will be enormous.

More than \$3.5 billion into transportation projects, including the new ten-lane Port Mann bridge crossing; South Fraser perimeter road; freeway widening through Surrey from Langley to Vancouver; Pacific Highway-176th Street four-laning project from Highway 1 to the U.S.; interchanges at 152nd Street, 160th Street and 176th enlarged and upgraded; a new underpass at 156th Street and Highway 1, connecting the Fraser Heights to Guildford; new on- and off-ramps at Port Kells' 80th and 192nd Street; and four-laning and widening of the Fraser Highway and Highway 10. And the new Golden Ears bridge will open this year.

These projects are creating tens of thousands of jobs in Surrey. They are getting residents to work sooner and back home to their families quicker, and they will reduce air pollution by getting rush-hour traffic moving.

For our children, our future, we have the new Surrey central campus of Simon Fraser University, the new Kwantlen Polytechnic University and the world-class Trades and Technology Centre, in addition to all the new schools being built. That, Madam Speaker, is building for today and the future.

I look forward to the comments from the member opposite and his agreement that Surrey is benefiting greatly from the forward-thinking actions of our government.

**J. Brar:** The member for Surrey-Tynehead has made a case for building for today and for the future. It is certainly a nice slogan, but the people of British Columbia will judge this statement by looking back at the reality and the record of the B.C. Liberal government.

I want to respectfully remind the member that the B.C. Liberals had eight long years to build for today and

for the future. Let us have a brief look at the record of the B.C. Liberal government.

The record shows that the policies of the Premier are out of touch with the needs of the average family, and the record is full of broken promises. In 2001 the B.C. Liberals promised to provide the best health care where you need and when you need, but in fact, they did exactly the opposite. They closed hospitals, they started privatizing key health care services, and they gave long wait-lists to the people of British Columbia in the ER room.

[1040]

The Premier of the province made a promise to the people of Surrey to build a new emergency room and said....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, take your seat, please. Take your seat.

Members, I believe that I've allowed a great deal of latitude, but the spirit of private members' statements is that they are delivered by a private member in a non-partisan manner. So I would ask members to please proceed in that fashion.

**J. Brar:** Madam Speaker, I completely agree with you and respect the comments made by the Speaker. But I would like to respectfully submit that in order to make the private members' statements meaningful....

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, take your seat. Member, I have ruled on that, and I ask you please to proceed in a non-partisan manner.

**J. Brar:** Thanks, Madam Speaker, for the clarification. I'm commenting on the issues the member made on the other side. The people of Surrey are looking for a new emergency room. It's a reality. They promised that the new emergency room will be ready by 2010. That emergency room, in fact, has been postponed — that's a reality — to 2014. That is not the future the people of Surrey would like to build. Of course, they want a future, and they want today a health care program which provides timely and quality health care services to the people of Surrey.

Just a few months ago.... I will share a story with the members. A teenage girl who was bitten by a dog had to go to the emergency room at Surrey Memorial. She had to wait for almost four long hours to receive 40 stitches. Imagine the pain this young lady would have gone through.

People of Surrey are waiting for significant improvements in health care, and that has not been the case. People want actions and actions now. It's about time to go beyond promises.

The second thing, responding again to the member opposite, is that people in Surrey want the educational system so that no child is left behind. Surrey is the fastest-growing community in the province and in the country. Of course the people of Surrey would welcome more schools.

Unfortunately, the policy has been that we have seen some schools close. That's a reality, particularly in Fleetwood, which is the fastest-growing community in the province. So the future in Surrey, when it comes to education.... The people of Surrey want schools which meet the capacity of the city based on the growing population of the city.

People, of course, have the right to feel safe. People want assurance from the government of the day that people can go out with their kids to the park, to the beaches and to the playgrounds. But that's not the case anymore. We all know that during the last two months we have seen open gun violence in the streets of British Columbia, and that has to stop. But in that particular case — when we look at the budget, which is a reality, and the cuts to policing and prosecution — that does not make sense, because that goes in the opposite direction.

People of the province certainly are ready to change the future. People want a government which will put the gang members behind bars. People certainly want a government who will tell the true cost of the expenses of the programs the provincial government is delivering, such as the Olympics and Olympic security.

**D. Hayer:** First of all, I want to say thank you to the member opposite for his words. I know we look at it from a different perspective. That's okay. That's why people elect us. They send us here to bring a different perspective here.

[1045]

I constantly go and talk to the people in my constituency — many of the working people, people who work in construction and the people who work hospitals, health care professionals, the nurses. The nurses say that they're pretty happy, actually. As a matter of fact, they said that they're happy to see this new contract, which they're looking at.

Also, I talked to many of the teachers. I have quite a few cousins who are teachers. My daughter wants to be a teacher. Then many of the small business people — I talked to them. They're saying: "We're happy to see our government is looking at today and then looking at the future."

They're happy to see that there are more schools being built in Surrey. They're happy to see that we have 360 more teachers now than they had in 2001 and that there are approximately 31 capital projects under construction and seismic upgrades going on in the schools. They're happy to see that about 15 new schools were built since 2001.

They also take a look at sometimes.... If you have a school where there are four-lane highways on all three sides of it — it's in a triangle, and you have trucks going through — the kids have to cross with all these trucks. The school is so old that they have had to replace it. It's in land that is all industrial, and it's not very safe.

They like to say that school boards, who should be elected by them, should decide. Do they really want a school there, or if they have capacity for other places, should they utilize that capacity? So I'm happy that Surrey school board has taken a leadership role to make the best

decisions for Surrey residents, which means putting more schools in there and hiring more teachers — like I said, 360 more teachers since 2001.

Also, when I talk to health care professionals, they're so happy to see the hospital improvements. They say that for a long time we should have had many improvements in hospitals but they weren't done. They should have been done over the last 20 years.

Finally, we have a new out-patient hospital under construction. That's going to be really good for Surrey residents. We're putting in \$650 million for the Surrey Memorial Hospital emergency expansion, which will be five times larger than that. That's almost \$1 billion in health care.

Also, it's over \$3.5 billion in transportation — like ten-laning the Port Mann Bridge, the South Fraser perimeter road and also, currently almost finished, the 176th Street four-laning, and other parts.

They see billions of dollars coming from the provincial government to Surrey. They're happy to see it. They want to say thank you very much to government. They want to say thank you very much to the MLAs who listened to their constituents and who provided that voice to Victoria so that they could bring all this money into education for universities and for the schools and, also, to make sure the economy was strong.

My time has run out. I'll have more to say later on.

#### 14,000 SIGNATURES

**D. Thorne:** I rise today to speak about the continuing widespread concern regarding the future of the Riverview lands, which are located in my constituency of Coquitlam-Maillardville. The massive housing development being considered for these lands by the current government will have a significant negative effect on this site and the surrounding communities.

To put my remarks into context, I would like to give a brief history of the Riverview site. In 1904 the province of B.C. dedicated 405 hectares — about 1,000 acres — of land on the west side of the Coquitlam River to provide treatment facilities for the mentally ill as well as for agricultural lands on the floodplain to supply food. In 1913 the West Lawn building opened its doors to 340 male patients. By this time, B.C.'s first provincial botanist, John Davidson, had planted at Riverview over 300 native species, including 30 species of trees, to form the first provincial botanical garden and arboretum.

Since the 1960s the hospital population has steadily declined. In the 1980s approximately 275 hectares of the Riverview lands were sold and subdivided for residential use, and 25 hectares were given to a forest preserve called the Riverview Forest. At this point only 100 hectares of the original 400 hectares are remaining for hospital use.

There have been many announcements over the years of the closing date of Riverview Hospital, but at present

it continues to operate with approximately 100 patients. There have also been longstanding rumours that the province planned to sell all or part of the remaining Riverview lands.

[1050]

The possibility of losing this valuable site for mental health and community uses prompted the city of Coquitlam to set up a mayor's Riverview task force in December 2003. I was a city councillor at this time, and we gave the task force the mandate to advise city council on the creation of a community vision and comprehensive plan for the future use of these lands. The task force met regularly during 2004 and received input from a multitude of individuals and organizations. Their report was presented to council on February 3, 2005.

In brief, the task force recommended that the lands be kept in public ownership with enhanced services for mental health and wellness; that the botanical heritage and ecology of the lands be protected; that centres of research, education and innovation be established on the site; and also that opportunities, if possible, be provided for heritage, arts and cultural endeavours. I accompanied representatives from the city of Coquitlam when they presented the task force report to the Minister of Health in 2006 with a strong request that it form the basis of any decision about future uses of the Riverview site.

However, the worst fears of the community were realized in July 2007 when *The Vancouver Sun* revealed in a lengthy article that the government was considering developing the Riverview site for market housing, with a small number of supported housing units included. Later the Minister of Housing stated that his preference, if such a plan were to go ahead, would be for at least 10,000 units of market housing to be built there. This surprise revelation, which occurred without any public consultation, raised alarm bells all over British Columbia.

The Riverview site is an important heritage and ecological space, and the prospect of it being covered with a multitude of condo towers is of great concern to residents not just in my community but throughout British Columbia. In response to the outcry following the minister's statements, I circulated a petition which has been signed to date by over 14,000 people who live in all regions of the province — surely one of the biggest petitions ever collected in British Columbia, certainly in recent years.

The petition states:

"We, the undersigned, are opposed to the provincial government's plan to massively develop the Riverview lands in Coquitlam. The Riverview lands are home to an important mental health facility and a nationally significant collection of specimen trees, many almost a century old. The Riverview lands are one of the most significant green spaces in the Tri-Cities" — and in the province.

"We urge the provincial government to adopt the 2005 Riverview task force report, which was coordinated by the city of Coquitlam and received input from numerous community organizations. This report recommends: the lands be kept in public ownership, with services for mental health and wellness; protection of the botanical heritage and ecology of the lands; the establishment of

centres of research, education and innovation; and opportunities for heritage, arts and culture."

This petition has received almost unanimous support from those who have come in contact with it, and that support cuts across all political and philosophical labels. Despite the minister's statement to the contrary, the world-class arboretum at Riverview would be destroyed by a massive housing development, because the tree collection is dispersed throughout the site. The trees are unique and considered by some to be the best collection in Canada, valued at well over \$50 million.

Recently the city of Coquitlam has received confirmation that the Riverview Hospital site has now been added to the government of Canada's register of historic places. Riverview is also included in the city's community heritage register as well as the provincial register of historic places. It's clear a market housing proposal attempted by this government not only would destroy an irreplaceable heritage and ecological site, but such a development would also prevent Riverview from continuing or expanding its role as a mental health service provider.

The government has promised public consultation before any decision is made about the future of the Riverview lands. However, since these petitions were tabled in the House, and the city of Coquitlam and others have made their strong opposition known, there has been an ominous silence from Victoria.

[1055]

The 14,000 British Columbians who signed this petition opposing private development on the Riverview site are still watching and waiting to see what the government will do next. As the MLA for the Riverview site, I will continue to work with them.

**J. Nuraney:** The matter of the Riverview site, I think, is a very important subject for discussion. As you know, this is a very large piece of property that the government owns. It's close to, I believe, 244 acres, which is a substantial holding, in my opinion, in terms of the real estate in a place where it is surrounded by urban development.

It is also interesting to hear the history of the land from 1903 as to what has taken place on this site. The site was originally designated for a facility to treat people with mental illness, which has continued to take place right up to this day. We now have about a hundred patients in that facility.

The original decision was taken many years ago by governments at the time to start devolving this facility and to start to take people out of the facility, to put them in a much more amiable environment where they would be treated and housed with proper support services. This government has seriously taken that matter on and has, over time, started to provide those kinds of facilities for the patients who were in that mental illness treatment centre.

It is also important for any government to understand the assets that they own and to consider the best use of

the property in the circumstances that we are in today. I am of the opinion that proper attention should be paid to the surrounding area — the greenery that is there, the trees protection strategy that is there. I think all of that should be taken into view as we begin to unravel the projects, as to what we should be doing on this site.

I have no doubt that B.C. Housing has looked at the various possibilities of development of this site which, I believe, also included affordable housing, which is a very much-needed requirement in today's society, as real estate prices escalate and people with low income and people who are struggling find it difficult to find proper housing. So it is important that we look at all possibilities for making sure that these lands are used for the purposes that benefit the public at large.

That, I think, is a laudable goal — making sure that after consultations with people and the stakeholders in the area, to arrive at a decision that would best benefit the public. I think what is so very important in this matter is that as we move forward, we have consultations with stakeholders, the first nations people and the community agencies that are operating in the area to see how best we can use these lands.

The question that is raised and the talk and the rumours about market housing and thousands of people coming onto the property are, I believe, part of this fear-mongering thing that should not be happening in society. These are very important matters. These are assets that are owned by the government. The government needs to see what the best use for the land is. The government needs to consult as we move along to develop plans.

None of that is really written in stone. We are still in the process of finding out what is the best use for that land, and I think it is totally inappropriate for anybody to spread rumours that would incite the public and incite the citizens in the area to say that here we are now going to do something that is totally unacceptable to people who live around the area.

[1100]

None of this is true. There are no plans yet. We are still under discussion to arrive at the best use of the property, and as we move forward, I am sure the public will have the opportunity to have input. There will be agencies and the stakeholders who will also be involved in the project.

**D. Thorne:** With all due respect to the member opposite, I'm stunned by some of the things he said, particularly about the government consulting the people who live in or around Riverview Hospital.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

If that were true, I could barely contain my excitement, because this is one of the problems. The government doesn't talk to anybody. Suddenly you open a newspaper

and find out all kinds of things, detailed plans — all kinds of things happening. Nobody in the community knows anything about it, especially and including the city of Coquitlam that put enormous resources and time, when I was still a councillor, into consulting every person in British Columbia, pretty much, who might be concerned about Riverview Hospital and its future.

So I couldn't agree more with the last speaker about consulting people being the way to go. Certainly that's true. I think we're a little far down that road, however. We shall see what happens. Contrary to consulting, right now there's an ominous silence which is very frightening to most people, including myself as the MLA.

The other comment made by the member opposite about the people being discharged from the hospital and being housed in the community with proper supports in lieu of being looked after at Riverview Hospital....

It just didn't happen, as everybody in this House knows. We only have to look at our streets today, and we know that plan did not work out. Whichever plans were hoped for, the money was not put into the other end.

People were discharged. There are less than a hundred people now at Riverview Hospital. In Coquitlam, Port Moody and Port Coquitlam alone, the Tri-Cities, the number of homeless people has tripled — a tripling of the number from 2005-2006 when the last count was done. We now have three times more people on the streets and in the ravines of the Tri-Cities.

We know that the facilities are not there. The supports are not there. We just discharge people and let them roam around, and now we have a huge homeless crisis, as everyone on both sides of this House has acknowledged.

Over one-third of those people in the Tri-Cities have been identified as suffering from a mental illness, and it could be higher. I'm just saying that it's at least over a third.

**Hon. T. Christensen:** We call Motion 27 on the order paper.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 27 without disturbing the priorities of motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

### Motions on Notice

#### BALANCED BUDGETS

**R. Sultan:** I'm pleased to offer the following motion for debate.

[Be it resolved that this House supports the return to balanced budgets in two years.]

About six weeks ago the NDP voted unanimously, I believe, in favour of Bill 48, the Finance Statutes (Deficit

Authorization and Debt Elimination) Amendment Act, 2009. Bill 48, as we all know, temporarily suspended for a period of two years the prohibition against deficits, thereby enabling our provincial government to run operating deficits in the next two fiscal years. For fiscal 2011-2012, however, the original tough-minded statute banning deficits in this province would be automatically restored.

[1105]

[S. Hammell in the chair.]

The NDP — undoubtedly anxious to show the world that in matters fiscal, they could be as flinty-eyed as anybody — voted in favour of the bill. However, in their subsequent public postures the NDP have clearly demonstrated that they have no intention of obeying this law.

For example, they declared they would jettison the carbon tax but would not jettison the 100 percent offsetting tax rebates. New hole in the budget? A mere \$2.3 billion. They boasted they would cut small business tax rates further — \$1.3 billion on top of the reduction from 4.5 to 2.5 percent already carried out by this government. A further rip in the fabric of the budget.

They would spend additional billions. For example, an NDP candidate on the North Shore last week, probably unfamiliar with this government's two-thirds growth in health spending, would restore what she perceives as cuts in health spending. One could easily foresee health budgets climbing from their currently projected three-year increase of \$4.8 billion to, let's say, twice that amount — another gaping hole in the budget.

Toss in higher wages here and there and a lot more money for friends and stakeholders, and we could easily discern the outlines of a \$10 billion deficit — in other words, quite possibly a return to the lack of fiscal discipline which characterized the previous NDP government in this province.

There's more than mere fiscal jiggery-pokery involved here. There's the ethical question of whether it is proper to vote for legislation which one has not the least inclination to be bound by. Is it a matter of parliamentary principle? I couldn't find enlightenment in my well-thumbed copy of MacMinn's.

One can always argue that to vacillate is to be human. I suppose some might also advance the view that upon reflection in these turbulent and changing economic times, it is not wise to set one's course prematurely. I would like to protest strongly against such a rudderless future.

Let's put British Columbia's deficit and debt situation into context. Our current government is projecting a three-quarter-billion-dollar cumulative deficit over the next two years — a lot of money, a big deficit — and then a return to small surpluses.

By comparison, in the 1990s our opponents, the NDP, brought in eight consecutive deficit budgets, doubling the

province's debt in the ten years they were in power. They were conscious of the need to try harder on debt management. Let's grant them that. So in the 1990s they tabled five debt management plans. They didn't meet a single one.

By the time this government took office in 2001, the province's ratio of debt to gross domestic product was almost 21 percent. Under the new government, it was brought back down much closer to where it was when the NDP started out — 14 percent.

British Columbia's operating debt, which soared from about \$5 billion to almost \$14 billion under the NDP, was brought back down to less than half that amount under this B.C. Liberal government — not quite but close to where it was when the NDP came into office. So this government repaired a lot of damage in our balance sheet and restored our reputation for fiscal integrity...

Interjections.

**Deputy Speaker:** Members.

**R. Sultan:** ...and was rewarded with a credit rating equal to that of the government of Canada.

But now the world of finance is beset by hurricanes. Little British Columbia, an exposed global trader, finds itself surrounded by beleaguered giants who have not followed the path of prudence. In this situation British Columbia's fiscal rectitude helps enormously but cannot really insulate us from the tempests originating abroad or, for that matter, from other parts of Canada.

The numbers are startling. British Columbia is anticipating a two-year deficit of three-quarters of a billion dollars — a big number. Ontario last week tabled a budget showing what the Conference Board of Canada called the final first in the province's trifecta of woes — the largest provincial deficit in history, \$14.1 billion.

[1110]

Ontario's budget papers tell us that relative to GDP, their net debt is projected to grow in three years from 24 percent to almost 33 percent, roughly triple that enjoyed by B.C. today on their measure. Let's not even try and describe Quebec, where the situation seems to be even worse by about a factor of two.

To sum up on the debt and deficit front, as with so many other socioeconomic indicators, British Columbia is doing very well in comparison with other provinces of Canada. All British Columbians and, particularly, our government, deserve praise for that.

Furthermore, Ontario and Quebec notwithstanding, Canada itself is doing well by international standards. Consider the following hierarchy of indebtedness published by the International Monetary Fund about 12 months ago. They show total government debt as a percent of GDP. Japan and Italy, a little over a year ago, 90 percent. U.S.A. and Germany, about 45 percent. France and the U.K., about 35 percent. Canada, only 23 percent.

So much for debt. How about operating deficit? Consider these more up-to-date figures from the most recent London *Economist* I looked at last night, showing government deficit as a percent of GDP, with some approximate rounding. United States, 14 percent. Britain, 11 percent. Japan and France in the range of 5 percent. China, 4 percent. Canada, 2 percent.

Given the United States embrace of accelerated deficit spending, what is particularly noteworthy is the U.S. government's huge — and I mean huge — expansion of that country's monetary base, presumably deemed necessary in order to flood the nation's financial institutions with liquidity, thereby to encourage them to lend and to buy substantial quantities of government debt. Hold on to your hats, folks.

Are debts and deficits important even in sheltered little B.C.? I should say so. Is it of consequence to make reckless, careless statements regarding the government's income statement and future balance sheets? It certainly is. As we watch mesmerized by the numbers from abroad, I would say yes with even more vigour. Through competent fiscal management, we've avoided the worst so far, and now is not the time for hints of a less disciplined leadership and a less rigorous approach.

To sum up, I would like to cite the observations of one Mr. Cottarelli of the IMF. In their March 2009 public periodical he said:

"The impact of the crisis on public finances" — now, he's talking about the world — "is substantial: the increase in government debt (as a share of GDP) in advanced economies is projected to be the largest and most pervasive since World War II.

"...because investor confidence in governments' creditworthiness has been key in preventing a complete meltdown of the financial and economic system, preserving such confidence is of paramount importance. Perceptions of fiscal insolvency problems, pushing interest rates up as debt holders demand a higher risk premium, would also undermine the effectiveness of fiscal stimulus measures."

Further, consider the following recent article IV statement to Canada from International Monetary Fund staff dated March 9, 2009 — excerpts only — following their assessment mission to Canada. Their admiration and their conclusion should apply with even greater consequence to British Columbia.

"Canada entered the global financial turmoil on a solid footing. Toward the end of 2008, however, the global environment deteriorated rapidly. The global deterioration is adversely affecting Canada through its strong international linkages. Looking ahead, output is likely to contract significantly in the near term, recovering as the full effects of fiscal stimulus are felt.

"At the same time, the strains evident in other countries are markedly less serious in Canada. Canada has responded proactively to the worsening economic climate."

[1115]

The IMF mission supports the large, timely and well-targeted fiscal stimulus in the 2009 budget.

They are referring, of course, to the federal budget. "The mission also welcomes authorities' commitment to medium-term prudence. Canada's financial system has displayed remarkable stability amid the global turbulence."

To conclude, I would ask whether, in light of the IMF's observations buttressed by our own common sense, this government's Bill 48 represents sound fiscal policy, and should its commitments be honoured by both sides of the House? Well, it's never wise to argue with the IMF.

**B. Ralston:** It is interesting to hear the member opposite speak about deficits, because I don't recall that kind of speech being made in these chambers in the years 2001 to 2005. Let me quote from the politically independent, non-partisan officer of the Legislature, the Auditor General, who set out in a report in November 2004 called *Monitoring the Government's Finances* some of the financial history of the province in recent years.

In 2001 the annual surplus was \$1.48 billion. That coincides with the last fiscal year of the previous government. Beginning in 2002.... I know they don't like this on the opposite side, because they don't like to hear from the Auditor General. For some reason a non-partisan officer of the Legislature offends them, and they'll probably attack his budget, no doubt, as well. In 2002 the deficit at that point....

Interjection.

**Deputy Speaker:** Just a sec.  
Member.

**B. Ralston:** In 2002, again quoting from the same report, the deficit was \$1.06 billion. In 2003 the deficit was \$3.004 billion, the biggest deficit in the history of the province; in 2004 a deficit of \$1.002 billion. Those are the facts taken from the Auditor General.

The argument that's advanced sometimes — it depends on the forum and who the speaker is on the other side — is that there was some kind of need to do that because of what is fictitiously called structural deficit, and I use "fictitiously" because I can't use any unparliamentary term.

But in fact, when you're looking at what the Auditor General had to say — again, quoting from the same report: "In 2001 the accumulated surplus was \$323 million." So 2002 begins the deterioration back into an accumulated deficit, based on the financial decisions taken by that government. So that argument that's advanced is completely fictitious, and yet it's still advanced, and we hear echoes of it from time to time.

The government, following the rebound in the economy, had surpluses from 2005 to 2008. This year the books don't close officially, and we don't get a report-out until June of 2009. I suspect that there will be a deficit in the 2008-2009 year, which ends March 31, 2009.

The government has projected deficits for the next two years. So looking at those two projected deficits and the previous years, in six out of ten years this government has either projected or run an actual deficit.

That's the situation that caused the Premier to toss and turn in his bed. Obviously, he has done a lot of tossing and turning over the last number of years in his bed.

The member opposite also quotes the IMF, and he quotes — favourably, I take it — the federal government's stimulus package, which will involve running a deficit there. I'm mindful of what David Dodge, a former governor of the Bank of Canada, said just recently — that he didn't think the federal government would be out of deficit until 2014 or 2015.

[1120]

I'm going to conclude my remarks, because there are a number of other speakers who want to speak. Perhaps unfairly, I'll quote the Minister of Finance of the province. He was interviewed by Mr. Palmer on February 10 and was asked about the legislation that the member speaks of.

"Finance Minister," and then follows his name, which is not permissible to say here in the House, "acknowledged as much when a reporter asked if a re-elected B.C. Liberal would be able to stay on track with the timetable outlined in his bill."

"'Let's put it this way,' the minister replied. 'I would not have said to you last September that the world would have unfolded the way it has in the last five months.'" The conclusion of the writer is: "So don't take this latest approach to budget balancing and debt retirement to the bank just yet."

That may be unfair, but that's what the Minister of Finance of the province said about his own legislation.

**J. Yap:** It's my pleasure to rise to speak on this Motion 27, and I thank my colleague the member for West Vancouver-Capilano for bringing this motion forward. It's a very timely motion because, as we all know, this will be the last week of the sitting of this Legislature, and colleagues will be returning to their constituencies to start talking to constituents, to British Columbians.

Over the next 43 days we want to focus our attention on the single most important issue that's on the minds of British Columbians, and that's the economy. We all remember the record of the NDP during the 1990s, resulting in the economy of the province of British Columbia going from vibrant and strong in 1991, in the early 1990s, to last place in Canada, to a doubling of the debt, to a structural deficit, which our government inherited.

The previous speaker, the Finance critic, the member for Surrey-Whalley, tries to downplay the significance of a structural operating deficit. Well, the fact is that a structural operating deficit of \$4 billion had to be dealt with. Our government over the first term took the measures needed to ensure that we could balance the budget and provide prudent fiscal management to the province of British Columbia, reducing taxes and yet allowing our economy to grow, for there to be prosperity, increased revenues and, therefore, investment in the areas that are important to British Columbians.

That's what our government did in these last eight years, and we're proud of that record.

I've had the opportunity to talk to many constituents over the last several months, and as I said, the issue of greatest concern is the economy and jobs. That is where we'd like to focus our attention, because that is the number one issue.

We now are living in a time of unprecedented global economic uncertainty. Governments are taking measures to try to shore up their economies, to try to encourage the creation of jobs. That is exactly what our government has done by acknowledging that through these difficult economic times, we need to adjust, for the next two years, our approach with budgeting but not stray away from our long-term commitment to ensuring that budgets are balanced. And that's exactly what we will do at the end of this three-year budget cycle.

Back on February 12, when this act came forward, we had a great debate on Bill 48, and the Finance Statutes (Deficit Authorization and Debt Elimination) Amendment Act was passed unanimously — unanimously. That implies that all members from both sides of the House support the intent of this legislation, that we believe in balanced budgets, that governments should live within their means, find ways to have a sustainable economy.

[1125]

What are we hearing now? We're starting to see members of the NDP starting to waver, starting to stray away after being so resolute about, "Yes, we want to have balanced budgets," and they voted in favour of this bill, Bill 48.

So we're seeing some wavering going on. They're making grandiose promises that will cost the province of British Columbia, totalling \$3.68 billion. The NDP leader has talked about getting rid of the carbon emission pollution tax at a cost of \$2.3 billion to the provincial treasury and \$1.3 billion in cutting small business taxes. All of these great promises and yet not talking about how they're going to balance the budget.

The fact is, if we look at the record of the NDP through the 1990s, eight consecutive years of deficits, we know, British Columbians know, that the NDP have no regard for ensuring that fiscal prudence is in place. The truth is that the NDP don't want British Columbians to know that they will, should they have the opportunity, run multi-billion dollar, multi-year deficits, which the people of British Columbia absolutely reject.

That is why it's important that this House support this motion, Motion 27, which I support and which I call all members of this House to support.

**S. Simpson:** I'm pleased to get an opportunity to get up and take a few minutes here to talk to this motion. As we know, all members of this House, I presume, are supportive of balanced budgets and believe that if you can balance the budget, that's what you do, and that's what you need to do.

Of course, the problem we have with this is that we really need to look at the facts as they stand. First of all,

as pointed out by my colleague, the member for Surrey-Whalley, the Finance critic for the official opposition, this is the government that took a \$1.4 billion surplus in 2001 left by the last government and then punched a hole in it and proceeded to run deficits, running.... The largest deficit in the history of British Columbia was a B.C. Liberal deficit.

That's what we know, and we know.... And this presumes, of course, that the government with their budgeting here could actually live with the two-year deficit, should they fool the people of British Columbia on May 12. Could they live with that, they still will have had six out of ten years of deficits from the B.C. Liberals. This will be a government that has run deficits six out of ten years.

So this government, which wraps itself pretty sanctimoniously in this fiscal management cloak.... The reality, when you start to look at what they've actually done, becomes much more suspect.

When you talk to British Columbians about the current budget.... You'll know that the government has suggested, I believe, that they're going to run a \$50 million surplus for this year, '08-09. Well, it's hard to find anybody who doesn't sit on that bench who believes that number.

It's hard to find anybody who doesn't sit on that bench, including many people in the business community who are supporters of this government, who will say: "There's no way that we're going to get out of the current year without a deficit." Now, we won't know that, of course, till sometime post-May 12. My guess is that as long as we get past May 12, the government is happy to tell British Columbians whatever they think they want to hear, as long as they get past May 12 before they have to deliver.

So you have a government here that will have run six out of ten deficits, should they fool the people of British Columbia on May 12 — a government that's told us that we're going to have a balanced budget this year, which nobody, other than the folks who sit on that side, believes. You have a government here with a Premier, who in saying we needed to run deficits for the next couple of years because we didn't want to cut too deep....

[1130]

I would note again that this is the government, this is the Premier, this is the Minister of Finance, who continued to deny the world economy and the circumstance of the world economy up to the very end, making claims, again....

Much like people don't believe their surplus this year, people didn't believe the comments of the Premier and the Minister of Finance when they said: "We're going to be fine. British Columbia is going to run surpluses. We're not going to face the challenges of everybody else." And, of course, both the Premier and the Minister of Finance had to finally acknowledge that that just simply wasn't true and that British Columbia, like everybody else, is facing the challenges of the current economic meltdown. But they were prepared to deny that and keep the blinkers on for as long as possible.

So what did the Premier say to us when he finally acknowledged that we were going to have a deficit? He said to us that he lost.... It was the most difficult decision of his life or something — I paraphrase him, I'm sure; something to that effect — and that he lost sleep over this deficit. That was his comment.

**L. Krog:** Tossed and turned.

**S. Simpson:** He tossed and he turned, as my friend from Nanaimo says.

Now, that's a good thing, I suppose, but you know what many British Columbians say to me — people in my constituency, people across the province? They say: "It's good that the Premier tossed and turned about the deficit, but I wish the Premier would have tossed and turned about child poverty. But he didn't seem to do that. I wish the Premier would have tossed and turned about meeting the housing needs of British Columbians, but the Premier doesn't toss and turn about those things. I wish the Premier would have showed some concern for senior citizens in British Columbia, that he's turned his back on for eight years, but he didn't do that.

"I wish the Premier would have talked about child care, but the Premier doesn't talk about child care. I wish the Premier would show some concern for kids with special needs in schools, but the Premier doesn't ever toss and turn about that. And I wish the Premier would show concern about a range of environmental issues that this Premier doesn't show concern about, but he's not tossing and turning about that."

We have a situation here where we have this motion that's before us today that, quite frankly, is a smokescreen for a government that's fumbling its way up to May 12, to election day, scrambling to try to find a way to fool British Columbians just one more time. But, you know, the reality is that in the coming weeks there is going to be a debate in this province, and it's going to be a good debate.

It's going to be a debate about what the aspirations of everyday families are. And what everyday families, I believe, are going to tell us — when everyday families are going to make the decision on May 12 — is that yes, they want balanced budgets. They want their government to show fiscal responsibility and to balance the budget, but they also want governments to consider the public interest.

They want them to consider the interests of their families, they don't want them to consider private interests, and they don't want them to be preoccupied with B.C. Liberal interests. So I hope and expect that the people of British Columbia and our everyday families will respond accordingly in about six weeks' time.

The motion is a good opportunity for us to have a little back and forth here. There's no doubt about that. But ultimately, the real decision gets made in about six weeks. We will then see who best has the interests and priorities of British Columbians on their agenda. And I'm confi-

dent that those who protect the public interest on this side versus those who advance the private interest and the B.C. Liberal interest on that side.... I'm confident that everyday British Columbians will make the right choice when the time comes.

**R. Thorpe:** It's a pleasure for me to rise in the House to support my colleague's motion: "Be it resolved that this House supports the return to balanced budgets in two years." Yes, as a father and as a grandfather, I support that motion, because our generation actually has a responsibility. It's to face the consequences of today and not pass them along to our children and grandchildren. That's what we should be doing.

[1135]

I am hopeful that some members over there, especially the grandparent members, will actually start to think about changing. Because it's very evident they are changing their commitment of the vote of February 12, 2009, when the NDP voted unanimously in favour of Bill 48 to return to balanced budgets in the third year of the budget cycle, in that budget.

You know, we've heard from the member for Surrey-Whalley, who actually did not even talk or mention the motion. By not acknowledging the motion, he has clearly shown that he will not honour his vote in this House of February 12, 2009. Also, we heard the member for Vancouver-Hastings speak. He said: "I kind of support balanced budgets." Then there was that key word, "but."

He, once again, like other members on that side of the House who want to mislead British Columbians, confirms that the NDP truly are experts in wiggle room and the Glen Clark accounting principles. That's what the member for Vancouver-Hastings confirmed here today.

You know, there are some members who have served in this House on the other side for a number of years. There's a member from Nanaimo, the famous.... Well, we don't have to worry about bingo right now. But anyhow, he said that the NDP will produce a platform for one year finances only.

Now, why would they only commit to one year when we have a three-year budget cycle in British Columbia? Do you think it's because they don't want British Columbians to know what they're planning in budget year 2 and budget year 3? A reasonable person with reasonable abilities would conclude that, I believe, anyhow.

Then, of course, there is the Finance critic, who said: "It's the law at the present time." Now, what would one think after a vote of balanced budgets in the third year, to make the comment: "It's the law at the present time"? They're not.... He's another member who's not going to honour his vote, and I look forward to the members over there standing up in this House and telling this House.... Are they going to honour their vote of February 12, or are they looking for their master's degree in wiggle room accounting also? That's what British Columbians want to know.

The leader of the NDP is, quite frankly, breaking her promise to British Columbians to produce a fully costed platform. That is a commitment that the leader of the NDP made to the people of British Columbia. We haven't seen it. According to the member for Nanaimo, we won't see it. British Columbians won't know. Yet who are the first to bring forward reckless and irresponsible approaches to British Columbia? The NDP. That's who's going to bring them forward.

You know, they talk about their approach to finances, and they quote the Auditor General. Didn't make reference to the credit-rating agencies. I wonder why they didn't do that. Could it have anything to do...? They destroyed British Columbia's credit rating. They took downgrade after downgrade after downgrade, loading costs of hundreds of millions of dollars of interest on British Columbians of today, our children of tomorrow and our grandchildren in the future.

That's what the NDP did in British Columbia, and it certainly appears to me that's where they're moving. You know, the sad part about all of this.... Perhaps, some members later today will stand and talk about their support of this, but in the meantime, one has to question their commitment to British Columbians.

[1140]

It appears that they want — they've said that they want — to introduce a crippling windfall tax in the gas and oil sector of British Columbia and increase the royalties. Well, what is that going to do? It's going to kill jobs in British Columbia. It's going to kill jobs in rural British Columbia. It's going to kill jobs throughout northwest, northeast and other parts of British Columbia. It's going to kill economic opportunities for first nations. That's what that's going to do. But apparently they're against jobs in British Columbia.

One of their favourite things is putting a moratorium on IPPs, green energy. Now, if I was not here and I had listened to the rhetoric of the NDP and their commitment to green energy.... What a joke, Madam Speaker. What a joke. Not only are they going to kill billions of dollars of investment, not only are they going to kill thousands of jobs, but they are denying first nations throughout British Columbia the opportunity for economic development for their families also. That's what that policy is going to do.

The member for Malahat–Juan de Fuca, one of the great masterminds of the NDP, says: "You know, we don't have to invest in B.C. Hydro. We can continue to import power, because when the NDP is elected" — according to that member — "we're going to have less jobs in British Columbia." Isn't that a positive outlook? Now, how do you have a balanced budget with less economic activity, with less people working?

What the NDP want to do is not take British Columbia into the future. They want to take British Columbia backwards, and we know they were masters in driving investment out of British Columbia, driving jobs out of British Columbia.

Let me tell you, ladies and gentlemen, because you know and the member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast knows this — and apparently he's quite happy about it — that I will not be seeking a fourth term. But I care deeply about British Columbia. I care deeply about the progress that British Columbians have made in every region of this province, and I do not want to see this province go backwards. But I'm so concerned.

To me, the choices are very, very clear. For those who do not want to support this motion here today, that do not want to honour their commitment in this House on February 12 of this year — less than two months ago; it's unbelievable — the choices are clear. The NDP — reckless and irresponsible fiscal policies. Our government — prudent fiscal policies. Policies that are going to kill jobs throughout British Columbia and cause continual hardship on our first nations throughout British Columbia. That's what the NDP want.

What are we working to do? Work with British Columbians to create jobs in every region of the province of British Columbia, to give our first nations economic opportunities that they deserve and that their children and their grandchildren deserve.

What are they going to do? They're going to grow debt — because they have been masters at growing debt — and, in growing debt in an irresponsible and reckless way, drive our credit rating down and build hundreds of millions of dollars in excess interest costs on our children and our grandchildren. That's what the NDP are going to do.

What are we going to do on this side? Continue to manage our debt to make sure it's affordable, to make sure that our GDP-to-debt ratio is manageable and that we maintain our credit rating. That's what this side of the House is going to do. Also, as I get near to wrapping up....

Interjection.

**R. Thorpe:** If the member for Powell River–Sunshine Coast continues, I might continue talking too.

Madam Speaker, the Leader of the NDP and the members in this House, quite candidly, are misleading British Columbians, because they are going to have to do what they do best: increase taxes, increase taxes on individuals.

[1145]

We know on this side of the House that the most powerful thing that we could do as a government is put that money in the back pockets and purses of British Columbians, because that's where the money is the most powerful — that they have the choices. The choices are simple. Increased taxation on that side of the House; less taxation on this side of the House. The choices are clear.

So as we move forward in an election that I will not be running in.... I know the member from Sunshine Coast is very, very happy, but I may have time to come up to

his riding and maybe help other people in that area during that point in time.

In this province of British Columbia hundreds of thousands of new jobs have been created. New opportunities in every part of the province have been created. We have put more money back in the pockets of individuals.

We have one of the lowest small business tax rates in all of Canada. Our corporate taxes are soon to be the lowest in Canada, and that has created economic opportunity. That has created jobs, and all in a fiscally prudent way.

**N. Simons:** What about your grandchildren?

**R. Thorpe:** As the member from Sunshine Coast mocks those who have grandchildren, I stand in support of people who have grandchildren and can have a vision forward — not to be irresponsible, like some members on that side of the House, and spend their livelihoods today so that they get to pay it back in the next 20, 30, 40 years.

It's time to stand in this House, to be accountable to British Columbians today, to be accountable to our children tomorrow and be accountable to our grandchildren in the future. That's what I stand for, and I support this motion before this House today.

Interjection.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member.

**L. Krog:** I'm not a great fan of TV comedy, but I must say, for those watching today in British Columbia, that was the best comedy half-hour I've heard in a long time.

I want to say very carefully, hon. Speaker, that my next remark is not about the member for Okanagan-Westside personally, but I could only describe his remarks as being, well, just silly. Just silly. There's no other term for it. How that member can stand up in this House after hearing the actual numbers from the independent Auditor General about the truth of B.C.'s finances in the last decade is just beyond belief. It is too amusing for words.

We know that on that side of the House they love big numbers. They love big numbers. Highest child poverty rate in Canada fifth year in a row — five years in a row. That's a big number.

Homelessness. Record numbers since the Great Depression. This government loves big numbers. And to top it all off, of course, the biggest deficit in the history of the province of British Columbia. You've got to love the numbers.

You know, you can always tell when the government is putting up something that they really know isn't quite defensible. When it's a legal issue, they use the shiny shield of the Attorney General, the former judge of the Court of Appeal. And when it comes to numbers, they stick up the member from West Vancouver because he was an economist, and they think that will give them credibility.

Now, when the member stands up and talks about steelhead, I know I'm getting the straight goods from him. But when he stands up and talks about the fiscal record of this government, I just get the feeling he's up for a Juno Award. Maybe it's an Academy Award, but it's some kind of an award for a performance. I've got to tell you: let the people be the judge of that.

The real awards ceremony is coming on May 12, and I just have that sneaking suspicion that the awards ceremony may not turn out to be quite the Olympic presentation the Premier has in mind.

Mr. Speaker, I've got to tell you that it is just too amusing when I hear the member for Okanagan-Westside say: "Oh, they're not taking a position on the motion." It was the NDP that brought in the first balanced-budget legislation. It was this government that amended it, and now it's giving its members of cabinet a get-out-of-jail-free card for a couple of years. It's too amusing for words.

[1150]

So to satisfy the member for Okanagan-Westside, we absolutely do support a motion to return to balanced budgets in two years. We'd like to return in one year. But this government, all through the best of times — with high resource prices, with record low unemployment — has done absolutely nothing for the people in our community who need it most. That's the reality. The numbers might disturb these members, but they know them to be true.

I've already talked about the child poverty rate. I'm not going to talk about promises, hon. Speaker, but let me just say that when I hear them talk about not being able to trust the opposition, I have to look back. Wasn't this the government whose leader promised he wouldn't sell B.C. Rail and then turned around and did it? Wasn't this the government that promised the most open and accountable government in the history of the province of British Columbia and now won't answer any questions week after week in this House?

You know, the member from West Van talked about the rudderless future. Well, what's rudderless about the future is the fact that this government, when every other government in the western world — indeed, around the planet — could smell a recession/depression coming and was actually taking steps to deal with it...

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

As late as last fall, after the collapse, the Minister of Finance was talking all gloriously about how things would be fine, and B.C. would be isolated, and we would be an exception to the rule. It's as silly as the remarks of the member for Okanagan-Westside this morning. Nobody believed it, so here we are today hearing about the Premier's sleepless night.

Now, there's a bedtime story you can tell your grandchildren, hon. Speaker. I know the member for

Okanagan-Westside wants to talk about grandchildren. That would put any grandchild — oh, goodness, I don't know — into nightmare zone, talking about the Premier's sleepless night when he realized he would have to run a deficit.

But there is one little bright spot in the whole of Canada as we speak now. There's one province that's actually going to balance its budget this year, and that's the province of Manitoba, presided over by a third-term New Democratic Party government under Premier Gary Doer. Now that is leadership and fiscal management.

There's an example this government could follow. Lowest unemployment in Canada. You don't have people sleeping all over the streets of Winnipeg like you do the streets of Vancouver. No, they've managed things well in the province of Manitoba.

I'm delighted to stand this morning and support this motion. I'm delighted to support this motion, and indeed, I hope when we're in government, we get there even faster. But for the members opposite to stand up and ignore the facts of the Auditor General and to talk about this.... What do they call that deficit, you know, when it can't be avoided? The member for Esquimalt-Metchosin probably knows what I'm talking about.

It's one of those cute deficits. Everybody likes to use the language now as if it somehow gives it the aura of truth when we know it's simply not true. A structural.... That's it. It's a structural deficit.

**M. Karagianis:** Fabricated.

**L. Krog:** Exactly. The member for Esquimalt-Metchosin has figured out the real term for it. It's a fabricated deficit, and we know it. Even Will McMartin, that conservative columnist, no friend of the NDP, describes it so beautifully in one of his books.

So as I conclude this morning, I want to say to the members opposite that I'm delighted to see you all here this morning. I look forward to seeing fewer of you after May 12, however, and hope you have a great election.

**R. Hawes:** I am noting the time, Mr. Speaker, so I'll try to be short. These members want to go through the revisionist history that they always do.

We inherited a structural deficit, and let me just explain to these members who don't seem to understand what a structural deficit is. Prior to the 2001 election, these folks, when they were in power, put together program after program that was not sustainable. They implemented those programs to try to buy votes prior to the 2001 election.

[1155]

When we took a look at those programs and the unsustainable cost of those programs, that created a struc-

tural deficit. Paul Ramsey, the Finance Minister at the time, said: "We cannot repeat the budget figures that we've put out in 2001 without very, very difficult choices." He knew the NDP government of the day had created a structural deficit that could not be fixed without significant cuts. That was left to a government that was elected in 2001 that, frankly, had a lot more honesty with the people of this province than the previous bunch. We took three years to recover from that dreadful time, and it was tough.

Now, I don't think the people in this province want to go back to where we were. We don't want to go back into a deficit situation. Everyone understands what's going on in the world today, so we've set it for two years. It's a highly noble target. This government....

In the promises they've already made trying to buy votes in this election, they're talking somewhere \$6 billion, perhaps \$8 billion, in deficit. It's easy, when you add up the figures and the reckless promises they're making.

We, on the other hand, are not making promises other than that we care about your grandkids. We're not going to go into a great debt hole for a long period of time, because we understand that deficits actually mean future taxation.

Under them, the future taxation is going to be tremendous. We will then see, again, the successive credit-rating cuts that we saw through the '90s. We will see the job losses and the movement out of the province. But with our government, since 2001, through prudent leadership: credit-rating increase after credit-rating increase, interest rates for us falling, debt falling, and frankly, confidence in the business community at unprecedented levels in British Columbia.

We know who creates jobs — private investment. The member down there from Vancouver earlier today said that they believe in public investment, where we are for the private side. The private side, actually, is what creates jobs. That's where most British Columbians work.

We will continue to grow jobs in this province, not in Alberta. That's why I support this legislation. I note not one of them wants to stand up and really say: "Our program can reach a balanced budget in two years." It can't happen with what they're promising.

R. Hawes moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. T. Christensen moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:58 a.m.

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