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THE HONOURABLE BILL BARISOFF, SPEAKER

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

**FIRST SESSION, 39TH PARLIAMENT**

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2009

The House met at 10:02 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

Prayers.

### Orders of the Day

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I call private members' statements.

#### Private Members' Statements

##### CELEBRATION OF ENTREPRENEUR SPIRIT DAY

**J. Kwan:** Small business plays a significant role in B.C.'s economy. It serves as a job generator, innovator and producer of niche products and services. In fact, the small business community is the economic engine of our communities.

[C. Trevena in the chair.]

According to the 2008 B.C. statistics, there were approximately 384,300 small businesses in B.C. This accounts for 98 percent of all businesses in the province. In B.C. 1,058,100 people were employed by a small business in 2008. This translates to approximately 34 percent of B.C.'s gross domestic product.

The range of activities in the small business sector is varied, and a significant proportion is in the service industry. They include the mom-and-pop corner stores, to self-employed computer programmers to your local restaurant to small industrial operations.

There are 8,500 small businesses in the high-tech sector alone. That's approximately 96 percent of all high-tech businesses in B.C. Virtually, there are small businesses of one form or another in all communities. They're an essential component of our community's fabric.

Last week I attended a wonderful event in my riding, where over \$500 million in revenues generated by small businesses came together to celebrate Canada's first Entrepreneur Spirit Day.

[1005]

Entrepreneur Spirit Day falls in the middle of Canada's Small Business Month, the month of October. This event was hosted by cityMax.com. It was an opportunity for the entrepreneurially-minded to get together to celebrate, to share their successes and challenges and to meet with other up-and-coming business owners. It was an excellent networking opportunity.

It was also a time to just relax and have some fun. It was an opportunity to honour and recognize the spirit of entrepreneurs. Also at the event there was a fundraiser

for an international microlender. CityMax.com sponsors three international entrepreneurs in their pursuit to expand their small businesses.

Attendees at Entrepreneur Spirit Day voted from 12 potential candidates, and the three international entrepreneurs chosen were a 49-year-old woman from the Philippines with a small business in the medical and health field, a woman from Ghana who will use sponsorship investment to purchase expanded stock for her fish store and a man from Bolivia who will expand a citrus fruit-farming operation with their microloan.

This is one small way in which cityMax.com, a small business in our neighbourhood, is giving back to support other entrepreneurs in the world. Their goal is to help and empower one million entrepreneurs throughout.

Aside from being a significant contributor to our economy, small businesses play a role in the social and charitable affairs of our community. British Columbians have a long tradition of donating and volunteering to support a variety of endeavours in our neighbourhoods. In fact, private contributions to community, whether through donations of time or money, have done much in support of the non-profit sector to serve their communities.

For example, in upper Mount Pleasant, the Mount Pleasant BIA's contributions include: graffiti-removal programs; street cleaning programs; facade grants to assist in upgrading building facades; an economic resource development centre with resources for members; a beautification program, including provisions of banners, flower baskets, trash receptacles and lights; an annual business directory; and sponsorship and promotion of a number of annual community events.

The Commercial Drive BIA hosts an annual benefit dinner for the food bank and sponsors free family-movie showings in local parks during the summer. They have also trained the local community safety team to provide information about services to homeless people. This is just a small sampling of the entrepreneur spirit of the small business community and its relationship to our communities.

The Chinatown BIA community contributes by providing cleaning of alleyways in the district, graffiti-removal programs, providing security patrol for businesses in the area, organizing the Chinatown Festival, providing window decoration for the Olympics and organizing events such as an event around the Olympic Torch Relay.

The Chinatown BIA shares an office with the Vancouver Chinatown Merchants Association, which promotes Chinatown and Chinese culture. Some of the programs include printing tourist maps of Chinatown and the pedicab program, which transports people to Chinatown from Canada Place. It is estimated that these contributions have a value of \$200,000 to \$300,000 annually.

In Strathcona the BIA's community contributions include sponsorship of the East Side Cultural Crawl, the Powell

Street Festival and a number of smaller community festivals throughout the year — putting on a yearly sustainability expo which is open to the public, cleaning of the streets and alleyways in the district, providing security to area businesses and putting up hanging baskets on Hastings Street. The BIA also started an innovative program to become Vancouver's first green business neighbourhood and is launching some waste reduction-sharing programs with its members.

The small business community is a lifeline to our communities. Let us honour and celebrate small businesses in our neighbourhoods, because when they succeed, we succeed.

**D. Horne:** It's with great pleasure that I stand and talk about small business and its contribution to British Columbia during Small Business Month. Small businesses in British Columbia represent \$11.9 billion of exported value, and, as the member opposite noted during her remarks, British Columbia leads Canada in small business.

Basically, we have the most small businesses per capita of any province in Canada, and we work very, very hard in eliminating red tape, in making it easy for small businesses to operate, in making it simple for small businesses to deliver services and goods to not only British Columbians but those in Canada and those abroad.

[1010]

Basically, \$11.9 billion is the value of exported goods and services from small businesses in British Columbia. That's something we should all speak very highly of, something that we should embrace.

Here during Small Business Month, small businesses and their contribution.... The member talked about all of the contributions to the community and the fact that small businesses and small business leaders work very hard to make sure that the community around them is well maintained and well taken care of, because small businesses do.

They are the fabric of the community. They are something that really makes a community thrive. It's something that employs the people, but it also makes it so that it is the culture of the community — the real feeling, the feeling on the street, the feeling in the neighbourhood. It's all the small businesses that contribute so greatly to that.

That's why we have to make sure that our small businesses are given all the tools that they can to ensure that they do strive and are successful in the future. Obviously, our government continues to work very, very hard at that with the HST and many other initiatives that we've put forward. We make sure that small businesses are given the tools to make sure they are successful and continue.

For many years, Madam Speaker, I was an entrepreneur. For many years before I was elected to this place, I ran my own business. I can tell you that as a small business person, there are many wonderful things of success but also many pressures in being a small business person

— having to worry about payroll, having to worry about whether you're going to get the next contract, having to make sure that you have enough revenues and manage your cash flows and do all the things necessary in order to make sure that all the people you employ continue to have the lifestyle that they enjoy, continue to have the paycheck that they count on each two weeks.

I can tell you that as a small business person, there were many times in my career where not only did I not receive a paycheck on the Friday, but basically I wrote a cheque to the company to make sure that those I employed received theirs. One of the things that is often forgotten about small business people is that they do care about the community. They care about those they employ, and they care about the economic development and the economy that they support.

Annual earnings for small businesses over the past five years have actually increased by 21 percent. One thing we often talk about is the wages that small businesses pay their employees and how that has changed over time. If we actually take a look, it's very important to note, with some of the conversations that we have on wages, that wages within small businesses have actually increased over the last five years by over 24 percent.

While businesses have been doing well even with this economic downturn.... Obviously, businesses are having difficulty in facing pressures, but even with that and with the times that we've had, they continue to pass on the benefit. They continue to make sure that their employees are well taken care of.

Obviously, by increasing the wages of their employees and by making sure that those wages are in step, they make sure not only that they retain those employees but also that they can contribute to the economy so that they can go out and buy the goods and services and the other things that make their lifestyles very, very nice.

Sometimes we talk about minimum wage and about the importance of monitoring that and taking a look at that. But you look at small businesses. You look at Tim Hortons. You look at Starbucks. You look at larger corporations....

**Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Member.

**J. Kwan:** Small businesses also have the longest working hours. In the effort to make their business successful, many small businesses put in their own time. This includes, of course, the self-employed, which is a significant proportion of the small business community.

[1015]

Just to be clear, when we talk about the small business community, we're actually talking about businesses that have 50 employees or less. In some cases it could be at the high end of 50, but in others.... Many of them are in fact just the owners themselves working to make a go at their business.

The small business community, of course, has to look at all the aspects of the issues that impact its business. This, of course, includes tax changes, and tax changes can have significant ramifications. Where there has been good news for the small business community is the reduction in small business taxes, which I'm pleased to say.... That's something that's been supported across governments no matter what stripe, which started, to my recollection, in 1996, when the then government actually initiated tax reductions for the small business community, and it has continued since that time.

That's actually good for the small business community. As I say, when they succeed, we succeed as British Columbians.

On the other hand, over time there have also been impacts that have been negative for the small business community. Changes such as the GST structure impact the small business community in the sense that it adds a tax which the business would have to off-load onto the consumer.

This, of course, is also going to be a concern, I think, for some small business communities, and that is the new tax that's coming forward, the HST. The member opposite, in his response, mentioned the HST. This too, I know for some small business communities, is a concern in terms of its ramifications not just in the goods and products that are being offered but also with the lease spacing which they have to rent. That's an additional 7 percent tax.

Madam Speaker, I also just want to say that in terms of their contribution, it's about partnerships, as well, for small businesses. While they do their work in the community, they often work with others to create the whole community and to unite the whole community. There are challenges from time to time, and I talked about some of their contributions such as graffiti removal, working with the homeless community and so on.

I think in every community across British Columbia there is a Rotary where.... The makeup of the Rotary, for example, often is from the small business community, and they contribute significantly in supporting the non-profit sector in B.C.

In other jurisdictions such as the United States, some 91 percent of small employers contribute to their community by volunteering with in-kind contributions and/or direct cash donations. Approximately 41 percent of them contribute in three ways. Let's celebrate the small business community this week.

#### B.C. OPPORTUNITIES

**D. Barnett:** I rise today to discuss the many exciting opportunities and importance of small business in B.C. As many of you know, October is officially proclaimed Small Business Month in British Columbia, making it 30 years the province has celebrated this integral economic sector.

B.C. was the first province to recognize Small Business Week in 1979 and three years ago expanded it into a month-long celebration. This extension is more than fitting considering the economic force impact that small businesses represent throughout British Columbia. The following is a chance to recognize the significant contributions of the small business sector and how important it is for all of our citizens in the province.

There were approximately 384,300 small businesses operating in British Columbia in 2008, accounting for 98 percent of all business in the province. With 87.7 small businesses per 1,000 people, British Columbia ranked first in the country in terms of small business per capita in 2008. As for employment opportunities, these percentages equate to almost 1.1 million people employed by small business, which is 46 percent of total employment in British Columbia.

One way of calculating the impact of these numbers is by the gross domestic product. The GDP is approximately 34 percent of B.C.'s entire GDP, which once again is the highest ratio of any province in the country. These are numbers that speak for themselves in their value to this province.

[1020]

Pertaining to growth, the small business sector continues to play a key role in strengthening job creation and economic growth in British Columbia. It is the driving force in private sector jobs, which directly reflects the importance of economic diversification within our part in the global economy.

We have recently experienced tough economic times. However, according to a survey of its members, the Canadian Federation of Independent Business reports that small business has pushed through these economic stalemates with higher than average confidence in its sector.

The numbers back these statements. Although we have all experienced a global recession, B.C.'s small businesses in the last two years have recorded a 1 percent growth even in facing such economic adversity. These are promising statistics that demonstrate the resilience of our small business sector and its ability to function and grow during difficult times.

The concept of small business encompasses many levels of operation. However, the classification usually tends to focus on numbers of employees. By definition, small businesses have less than 50 employees. Of the 98 percent of all businesses being small business in B.C., it is important to understand that 55 percent of these businesses are run by self-employed individuals with no paid help. It is critical that we recognize the significance of this, not only for our economy but also for what this means for those who are driving it — these self-employed, motivated individuals.

That is exactly what this government has done. Since 2001 this government has cut the red tape by 42 percent,

eliminating over 152,000 regulations — from unnecessary fees and licences to streamlining requirements — to get these small businesses up and started.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member. I would remind members that this is supposed to be completely non-political.

**D. Barnett:** Straightforward B.C. is the catalyst behind this movement in making regulations clear and simple. It is clear, by working with the small business community and the private sector to identify and address economic competitive issues and make B.C. the most business-friendly jurisdiction in Canada.... This brings up innovative ideas and leadership that come from the innovation and leadership of small businesses.

We all know small business people, and we use this service every day. However, it is imperative that when discussing the concept of small business, we as British Columbians understand the importance that this sector has for all of us. Small businesses are not only a substantial part of our economy and major source of employment but something that encompasses all of the everyday functions people across the province experience. By supporting small business in B.C., all citizens benefit from the rewards of a strong economy.

In the Cariboo-Chilcotin, with its vast geographic area, small-sized businesses are found everywhere — sometimes only a grocery store in a lonely location with a coffee shop. These are the heart of the community, a gathering place to share life experiences.

Our small business communities support our community volunteer events, our chambers of commerce, our Rotary clubs, our women's institutes and our fall fairs. All that we do in our communities is supported by small business in one way or another.

We certainly have all seen the impact small businesses make in our communities, and that is why it is so important that we support these small businesses in our communities, that we shop in these small businesses in our communities and that we understand the importance. This is why it is so important to celebrate.

Let us all take a moment to reflect on the enormous contribution that the thousands of individuals who operate small businesses, not only in British Columbia but across Canada, make. Not only do they have an impressive economic track record, but small businesses are the heart of our communities. Consider how bleak life would be without our favourite restaurants, pubs, groceries, boutiques, bakeries and others.

How many small businesses do you frequent without even thinking about it? What makes small business encounters so satisfying is that they are personal.

[1025]

**B. Simpson:** I appreciate the member for Cariboo-Chilcotin's words. That seems to be the theme today —

to talk about small business and the impact that small business has in our communities.

I know from personal experience how difficult it is to run your own business. It definitely is, without question, a labour of love. I think next to farmers — who have to have the most positive outlook, regardless of what's happening on the land base or the weather — small business owners also have to have extreme confidence, because it is a labour of love.

At one point I had two retail stores in Quesnel. I had a store that I started up myself — toy store, games and puzzles and so on — and then I bought with a partner a shoe store that we thought we could save from bankruptcy. I can tell you that I've never worked so hard in my life, and it was something that I realized was an experiment in futility, for my personality type. It just did not work. As a consequence, that was not a successful venture. So I have great respect for every individual who can make a go of a small-, medium-sized enterprise, particularly those who run it through a family enterprise or as individuals.

I think it is important that as we celebrate Small Business Week, now Small Business Month, we reflect on what we need to do as legislators to make sure that these individuals have the supports that they need. I take to heart the member's comments about the kinds of things that we need to do to make sure that we support small-, medium-sized enterprises, because there is a fundamental shift going on in our economy.

It used to be that most people worked in well-paid jobs with benefits, pensions, job security. Of course, now we know that most people who work in those kinds of enterprises work every day with job insecurity. Given the state of the global economy, people go to work each day not sure if their company or if their large enterprise is the next one to fold as a result of whatever is happening on the global scene.

We have seen a significant shift, not necessarily by choice but simply because people want to work. They want to put food on their table. They want to pay their mortgages, and so they take whatever skills that they've got, whatever abilities they've got — sometimes their cashed-out pension — and get into small-, medium-sized enterprises. As the member for Cariboo-Chilcotin pointed out, many of these enterprises involve self-employed individuals.

As a consequence, we have an obligation here to look at — I would suggest — three areas that we must make sure that as legislators we take into consideration when we look at legislation here and when we look at the government agenda.

First and foremost, are we allowing individuals in our communities to have the disposable income to enjoy these enterprises? Are we making sure that people have income security and that they have the kind of benefits they need to go to our small businesses?

Second, are we supporting them with regulation and taxation, as required?

Third, are we supporting them as individuals? I think the member is right. Many of these individuals do not have benefits and pensions, and I think that's something that we, in this Legislature, need to look at. How do we support self-employed individuals and how do we support small enterprises with the kinds of benefits, the kinds of pensions that they used to enjoy when they were employees of larger enterprises?

I think that's a challenge to us. I think it's a way that we can respect those enterprises, and I think it's one of the best ways that we can support and recognize small business enterprises in the province.

**D. Barnett:** I thank the member for Cariboo North for his kind words about the most important part of many of our communities: the small business sector.

I do have some concerns when I hear the words "income security," as I do not know what that really means in some people's minds. If it means that we should guarantee that small businesses have government programs such as social programs to assure that they do not fail, I have concern about that because you are no longer an independent business.

[1030]

The way that we can continue to support small business is by regulating small business in a way that does not impede how they do business. I believe that we also must continue to support them in any way we can.

Where I come from... I've been in small business most of my life. I understand. As one of my colleagues said earlier today: "Who gets paid first?" Sometimes it's not the owner. Many times it's not the owner. But we as small business people, as long as we continue to support our communities by participating, by building programs.... As my colleague said earlier today: "Support your community, and hopefully, your community will support you."

Our children learn much, I believe, from those who are in small business. My children learned early and quite well what work habits were. I believe the more that we can support our youth by having them in our small business during the week in which our schools ask if small businesses will have youth participate.... I believe small businesses participate in that way.

Once again I congratulate small business, and I ask that each member of our institution here continues to support small business in the manner in which we can.

## H1N1

**J. Brar:** I rise to make a statement with regard to some serious gaps in the H1N1 pandemic plan and to make suggestions to address those gaps for the benefit of the people of British Columbia. There's no doubt that managing and dealing with this new pandemic called H1N1 is an uphill and daunting task. Therefore, first of all, I appreciate from the bottom of my heart the extremely

complex and extraordinary work our civil servants are doing in order to deal with this less-known and unpredictable H1N1 pandemic.

I want to emphasize the point that I don't have any intention to question the commitment and the hard work of our civil servants. The sole purpose of my statement this morning is to talk about the serious gaps in the H1N1 pandemic plan and, subsequently, to make suggestions to deal with those gaps for the benefit of the people of British Columbia, and I am here to do just that.

The first gap is that there's a need to amend the Employment Standards Act to provide job security in the form of an unpaid leave for workers following stay-at-home orders during a declared provincial emergency.

The provincial health officer is estimating that the H1N1 influenza could infect about 20 percent of the B.C. population, which means lots of workers will not report at work, as they will be asked to stay home due to H1N1 flu, and some workers are concerned whether their jobs will be secure or not. The organized labour have some protection for such category of workers through collective agreement, but for someone who is not covered by a collective agreement, there wouldn't be such protection available.

This amendment will address concerns over both employees' job security and public health. By ensuring job security, it reduces the likelihood of having employees going to work in contravention of public health orders and thus not transmitting the H1N1 virus to others.

Ontario has recently amended the Employment Standards Act to provide job security in the form of an unpaid leave for people following stay-at-home orders. Therefore, I strongly propose an amendment to B.C. Employment Standards Act to protect workers in the form of unpaid leave for workers following stay-at-home orders during a declared provincial emergency.

The second gap is the lack of daytime custodians in the elementary schools to implement the key recommendation made by the Public Health Agency of Canada to clean high-touch surfaces in schools at least twice a day.

[1035]

On October 24 the Minister of Education announced the pandemic response framework for a board of education. This pandemic response framework falls short of requiring high-touch surfaces in schools to be cleaned at least twice daily, as recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The reality is that some elementary schools no longer have daytime custodians and, therefore, are unable to stop the spread of H1N1 in schools. For example, Surrey elementary schools do not have a custodian on site until after 3 p.m.

If not cleaned properly, these classrooms will serve as incubators for the swine flu virus to spread rapidly. Therefore, I propose that concrete steps should be taken

to ensure that schools can be properly cleaned as recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada and that that heightened cleanliness standard can be kept in place for the full duration of the H1N1 pandemic threat.

The third gap in the pandemic plan is the question about health care capacity to provide services for the successful completion of the Olympics and for the next wave of H1N1 outbreak. By the time the next wave of the H1N1 virus hits British Columbia, final Olympic preparation will be underway, and the health authorities will be continuing to look for ways to trim their budgets.

I would like to emphasize the fact that all three things — Olympic Games, H1N1 outbreak and funding cuts to health care — will be happening at the same time. Therefore, the health care capacity for that particular time remains questionable. The reality is that the British Columbia health care system is running at nearly 100 percent capacity, so the ability to take a big, huge surge of people is a significant problem.

Our health officials predict that as many as 5,000 patients may end up in hospitals as a result of the H1N1 virus alone. Therefore, the number of ICU beds and the number of ventilators remain a serious concern to many health care professionals.

The impact of the H1N1 pandemic on the Olympics is unpredictable, and in a worst-case scenario, the impact could be significant. In a normal situation, all decisions regarding games and athletes are made by the International Olympic Committee, but these Olympics may be unique in that respect. There is a possibility that we will experience a big wave of H1N1 flu when the Olympic Games are underway, thus decisions regarding the games and athletes may become much more complex because input from health professionals may become a crucial factor in decision-making.

To conclude this part, both the Olympic Games and H1N1 pandemic require significantly more health care resources. The key question is how health authorities can create additional capacity when they have massive funding shortfalls.

Therefore, the first action I propose is that an audit be conducted as soon as possible to assess our health care capacity to provide services for the successful completion of the Olympics and for the next wave of H1N1 outbreak that is expected to be at the same time during the Olympics.

**D. Hayer:** Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the statement from the member for Surrey-Fleetwood on H1N1. That's a very important topic. I can tell you that every business relies on success because of its employees. I'm sure all the businesses will look after their employees, because without looking after the employees, all the businesses will fail.

I want to take this opportunity this morning to talk about this terrible pandemic, H1N1, a virus that is sweeping the

world and, surprisingly, seeming to attack the healthiest and youngest first. While we in British Columbia are aware of this disease, we are taking a serious approach in addressing this pandemic through our government and the health authorities, leading the way in providing vaccination against H1N1.

On the other side of the border, the President of the United States, Barack Obama, has declared a national state of emergency because in America more than 1,000 persons have already died from this terrible virus. Among those 1,000 are more than 100 children.

[1040]

That is what's strange about H1N1, which is a very difficult issue to deal with, but we're dealing with it. It appears that those who would normally be considered the most vulnerable, our senior citizens, are not getting sick in great numbers. Who are getting sick and who are dying from this virus are the persons who were up to now healthy young women, and particularly pregnant young women, and this is frightening to many.

It is also scary that many young children are vulnerable and so, too, are our first nations citizens. This government is taking steps to protect the most vulnerable right away and will soon be able to protect all who wish to be vaccinated. In fact, as we speak, people in British Columbia are lining up for their free flu shot. Starting today, the people who will benefit the most from the pandemic H1N1 immunization, and who need and want to get vaccinated, will be able to receive that vaccine should they choose to do so.

These groups include people under the age of 65 with chronic conditions, pregnant women and people, including first nations, living in remote and isolated settings and communities. People who fall into these groups, and for whom the seasonal flu vaccine is normally recommended, will be able to receive both shots at the same time. People who do not fall into these groups are asked to put off receiving the H1N1 vaccine for a few weeks to allow those at most risk to get their vaccine first.

Starting the week of November 2, people eligible to receive the H1N1 vaccine will be expanded to include the following groups: children from six months to less than five years of age, health care workers — including all health care workers involved with the pandemic response and delivery of essential health care services — household contact and care providers of infants less than six months of age and persons who are immunocompromised.

People who fall into these groups and for whom the seasonal flu vaccine is normally recommended will be able to receive both shots at the same time. In mid- to late November, everyone else who needs and wants the H1N1 vaccine will be recommended to receive it. The public notification will happen at this time so that everyone is aware that the vaccine is available to them right away.

All British Columbians who need and want H1N1 vaccine will be able to receive at least one dose of vaccine before Christmas. For adults, one dose of vaccine will be sufficient, while kids under the age of ten will also need two half-doses spread three weeks apart.

All this is happening because this government is extremely concerned for the health care and well-being of its citizens. Through our quick actions, British Columbians are and will have vaccine options available to them. As soon as Health Canada regulators approved the H1N1 influenza vaccine, we made certain that it would be available to our residents, and that is happening right now, today.

We need to protect those who are at high risk first, and we are doing that. We are also urging all who are normally recommended to get the seasonal flu shot to get both at the same time. I would like to note that British Columbia has been ready for a pandemic because our government has had the planning going on at the provincial and health authority levels for years on pandemic preparedness. As a result, British Columbia is well-prepared for a large-scale spread of flu, with the health care system ready to respond quickly, efficiently and appropriately.

In addition, we have developed various tools to help the public and health care providers prevent the pandemic from spreading further and to protect their own health. There is a great wealth of information on the government website, on TV, on radio ads and the 811 nurse phone line for those who have questions about the H1N1. And information is also available on flu clinics on [www.immunizebc.ca](http://www.immunizebc.ca) website and more information is available at [www.healthlinkbc.ca](http://www.healthlinkbc.ca). We are prepared to protect British Columbians, and we are doing it.

**Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Member. Member, please take your seat.

**D. Hayer:** I hope the member will talk about the H1N1 — how important it is. The TV is talking about it today. Since this morning, that's all I heard.

**Deputy Speaker:** Member, will you please take your seat. I would like once again to remind all members that these are private members' statements to discuss issues that are relevant to private members.

**J. Brar:** Once again, I appreciate the comments made by the member for Surrey-Tynehead. We are all blessed to live in the province of British Columbia where we have a public health care system, a system which can respond very quickly to a pandemic like H1N1 or any other situation like that. So we must make a note of that.

The member made a few comments that I want to respond to. The first one — the member said that we have the vaccine available. Yes, we have the vaccine available, and we are all pleased to see that.

But I would like to make a point that the vaccine in Canada is coming almost three weeks after every other country around us has got the vaccine. For example, the United States started giving the vaccine about three weeks ago — the same in Australia, England and other countries. So we are getting the vaccine almost three weeks after other countries have started giving the vaccine to their people when it comes to H1N1.

The second thing I want to mention, listening to the member, is the mixed messages given to people, particularly in the case of pregnant women. The member made comments that the vaccine is available today. The latest press release issued by the government says in one paragraph, the first paragraph, that the vaccine for the priority group, which includes pregnant women, will be available effective today.

Then if you read the press release further, in the second or third paragraph it states that the vaccine which will be specifically prepared for women, called non-adjuvant vaccine, will be ready by mid-November. This means the vaccine for those women will, in fact, be ready in mid-November. So there are those kinds of mixed messages being given, which has of course created a lot of anxiety among women.

I must say this. We need to be more prepared for the future, and we must take all necessary steps to ensure we have the best, pragmatic H1N1 pandemic plan for the people of B.C. In order to achieve that goal, I call for an independent review of all aspects of the H1N1 pandemic plan, including planning, implementation, capacity, accountability and public relations, and its findings must be made public when available.

#### BUILDING FOR THE SILVER TSUNAMI

**S. Cadieux:** I'd like for a moment for us all to think about how many homes we've visited in the last 25 years. They could be the homes of your family, your friends, your colleagues, perhaps even your constituents. Then I'd like you to think about this quote: "In the past 25 years I've visited two friends' and family homes." That was said by Pat Harris. Pat uses a wheelchair.

What would you do if your child had an accident and required the use of a wheelchair? Would you carry them up and down the stairs every time they needed to access the house? Or would you move your home? Could you do that?

Now let's consider the fact that there's a growing population of older adults in British Columbia — in fact, in the world. The marketing world has tagged this phenomenon the silver tsunami. To most of us that's not news. We've read the newspapers and the research, and we've heard the statistics. But have we really thought about what that means?

Are we thinking about what we need to do to prepare? Certainly, this tsunami won't be a world disaster, and I

certainly would not suggest in any way that we be fearful of it. We have, as a society, for some time been thinking about its impact on our pension systems, on our health care system and even on our schools. But as individuals, have we thought about what it means to us? We all know that we'll age, and we might not like it. We might colour our grey hair, and we might deny our birthday. But are we thinking about the realities of aging while we do that?

I don't know how many people are aware that there is a growing number of people with disabilities and that that number is going to be significantly impacted even further by the looming tsunami. For people over the age of 65, the disability rate is between 36 and 58 percent — climbing, of course, with age. That's a lot of people.

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation findings in recent research say that seniors' demand for owner-occupied, ground-oriented dwellings will increase by 194 percent in the next approximately 30 years. Now consider another fact: 90 percent of all single-family homes in North America lack basic access.

A lack of basic access means that people with disabilities and older adults are often unable to enter or leave their home safely, are unable to enter their own bathrooms, are unable to visit friends and relatives, are forced often to live in institutions and ultimately are unable to participate in society.

[1050]

So why is it that 90 percent of homes remain inaccessible? There's a common argument from the building industry that the market should decide and that, obviously, right now there is no market.

Let's just pretend that I haven't given you all the stats indicating the contrary. The reality is that people who most need these features often have these needs emerge very quickly, after an illness or an injury. While dealing with that illness or that injury and usually under a great deal of time pressure and other important stressors, I would argue that these people are not able to advocate with the market for those changes.

A few years ago my husband and I decided we would purchase a home. Friends of ours had bought a home in a new development, a built-to-suit development, and we thought: "Great. Let's look in the same place." We were told that my needs could not be accommodated. Other people I know have been told, "Oh yes, of course we could accommodate those needs," and there'll be a significant up-charge for the changes to the plans.

I also countered the builders and developers with this argument. Builders don't just respond to the market. In fact, they actively shape it. Just like any marketed product, developers of housing — just like technology and fashion and convenience foods — continually promote new products that they can up-sell, actively educating buyers as to what their desires and needs actually are.

It seems like a good idea, you might say, but it's just too expensive. People can't afford to build accessible homes.

It's a common belief, but it's just not fact. In fact, there are always a lot of concerns about the costs of building these features, but the SAFERhome Society here in B.C. has proven that the construction costs are less than \$900 in new construction per single-family home and less than \$500 in a multifamily setting.

The expense is really only prohibitive when one has to build and renovate an existing home. Design modifications in that case can be \$10,000 just for one bathroom.

Even if your family is fortunate enough never to require the features, you're likely not to be the only owner of the house. In fact, 25 to 60 percent of new houses will at some point in time have a resident with a long-term mobility impairment.

I think we need to consider that we need to build homes that have more access and that will provide for people to age in place.

Basically, we need to be considering visitability. What visitability means, primarily, is that we have level entranceways with no stairs to every home in at least one place. We need to have 32-inch doorways so that people can get through with a wheelchair or mobility device, and we need to ensure that there is at least a half-bathroom on the main floor of that dwelling. That way everybody can access the homes of their friends and family with ease and make minor modifications to that home should they need to live there long term.

The SAFERhome Society would like to see slightly larger standards, and those would be inclusive of necessary electrical provisions for elevators and so on, which would make homes even more adaptable. Certainly, legislation is one route, but it's not necessarily the only one.

**S. Hammell:** It's a pleasure to respond to the member for Surrey-Panorama. It's interesting that the topic of the silver tsunami has taken such a very clear focus, and that is interesting because it does allow us to speak about access and the need for access throughout our communities.

[1055]

I was with someone from another country, as I recall. I was trying to remember as I was listening; I think it was someone from India. He was actually floored, surprised, by the extent to which we in our communities try to make our communities accessible to people who are disabled.

He was mentioning the way that we curb our sidewalks, the way we ensure that there are parking spaces and elevators where we require and that we have done a number of things community-wide and set up the rules and regulations to move that value forward, to make it accessible for everyone in our community.

Having said that, it's clear that we haven't done enough. I have twice — in fact, three times, I think — witnessed people who have a significant disability and who are dignitaries in our community, carrying on a very important role

in terms of our community, be denied a presentation or found being able to present in a formal way with the other dignitaries very difficult.

I saw Rick Hansen wheel his way up a ramp that was too steep, in my estimation from watching. He only made it because of the incredible physical prowess of the person — being able to move up that ramp, make it to the top of the stage and then present on behalf of his community the words that he was trying to present.

I've also witnessed in my community the member for Surrey-Panorama being denied the mike because of access, and I don't think that's right. We have a community that a variety of people live in. We are represented by that variety of experiences and people representing that. We have to make sure that our community is inclusive and that the voices speaking for all of us that, in particular, represent the various communities make it to the mike.

If you think about it, though, we have come a long way. We have a lot further to come. In my community now I see many, many motorized vehicles allowing people who are disabled to move around the community, where we did not see that a number of years ago. Before my father passed away, in fact, he had one of those machines, and it enabled him to get out where he could not have gotten out before. Certainly, we have made significant improvements, but we have a long way to go.

The principle of aging in place, where we can move through the aging process and stay in our homes as long as possible, is certainly something most of us desire and would want to do. It is not only more cost-effective in terms of care; it's probably more comfortable for the person involved.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

When you think about the little cost that's involved — \$900 for a single-family dwelling and \$500 for a multi-family dwelling; I would assume that that has a lot to do more with the size of the halls and the ability to move inside doorways — it's something that we as a society can certainly make a goal and hope to achieve.

In responding, I am very pleased to be able to add my voice to the member for Surrey-Panorama. I think there's a need for all of us to ensure that our community is accessible as we move into the future, where we clearly see more and more people being able to move around and get around with the various new forms.

**S. Cadieux:** Thank you very much to the member for Surrey-Green Timbers for her comments. Really, we are talking about sustainability and sustainable communities. We hear a lot about sustainability. Basically, that hinges on three things: equity, environment and economy. Certainly, then, it follows that homes are a piece of that. We need to make sure that we design those homes for the long-term needs of a broad range of people.

[1100]

I have a quote here that I'd like to read from a friend who is very involved in the business and works with designers. Basically, what he says is that we need to change four top attitudinal barriers. We need to accept that the building code minimums are.... We need to change that, right now, the belief is that the building code minimums are the benchmark. We need to change the fact that we believe we should site-plan on the abilities of only 8 percent of the population, who are young able-bodied males. We need to recognize that there's an absence of access requirements for exterior and recreational applications and a lack of knowledge about the application and practice of universal design, which results in benefits to all users.

Again, I thank the member for her comments and support. It is something we need to think about not just for the folks that currently have disabilities but for the fact of the aging population. Right now we have one in nine seniors; by 2030 we'll have one in four. We need to recognize that they, too, will want to live in their communities and as independently as possible.

**Hon. G. Abbott:** I call private member's Motion 15.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, unanimous consent of the House is required to proceed with Motion 15 without disturbing the priorities of motions preceding it on the order paper.

Leave granted.

#### Private Members' Motions

##### MOTION 15 — EMPLOYMENT STANDARDS FOR YOUNG WORKERS

**R. Chouhan:** I'm pleased to move Motion 15.

[That this House support discussion and debate of changes to employment standards to protect young workers under the age of fifteen.]

On September 21, during the budget estimates debate, which I had the opportunity to debate with the Minister of Labour, I raised this issue of young workers and that the protection they used to have is not there anymore. I talked about that in 2003.

[L. Reid in the chair.]

The government of British Columbia passed Bill 37 to amend the Employment Standards Act, eliminating the requirement for employers to obtain a permit to employ children between the ages of 12 and 14. Since then, there has been a tenfold increase in accepted WorkSafe B.C. injury claims among children under 14 years of age over a four-year period between 2004 and 2008.

When we were debating, the minister responded by simply saying that employment standards did not

change and the occupational safety program did not change. The minister continued: "What we have done is allowed parents and employers to be involved in their children's work while allowing children to be protected by all of the same protections that are there for all workers." That was the most incorrect statement made by the Minister of Labour during those debates on May 21.

As we know, since the changes have been made to the Employment Standards Act, the requirement now is that only one parent has to provide the letter to let their child work in any workplace. Prior to that there was a requirement that the director of Employment Standards Act must provide a letter authorizing the child to work and a letter from the school principal to ensure that that child's ability to learn would not be jeopardized. A letter from both parents was required to make sure that they were both in agreement.

[1105]

Now we have only the minimum requirement, which is that only one parent needs to provide a letter. What we have seen is that even that bare minimum standard that we have in place is not being met in B.C. That's what's happening.

On October 8 the *First Call* report was issued. That report raised the same issues that I raised on September 21. It also asked the government to make sure that children under the age of 15 are protected.

We raised, the same day, questions in question period. Again, the answers provided by the Minister of Labour were not sufficient. B.C. has failed to protect these young workers. B.C. is the only province in Canada which does not provide the necessary protection that we need to protect workers.

It has become a national and international embarrassment. Other provinces, the U.S.A. and the European Union all have higher standards than B.C. What we have also seen here, which was pointed out to the government many times over, is that the government's actions are in contravention of the United Nations and of the International Labour Organization's conventions.

If that's not enough, we have a \$6-per-hour training wage for these young workers. So we have two strikes against these young workers. One is that we have no regulations to protect them. Second, they have the lowest hourly minimum wage in Canada.

The injury rate that we have seen over the years, as I mentioned earlier, has increased tenfold. The bare minimum standard that we have now in B.C.... The reality is that 58.3 percent of 12- to 14-year-olds with jobs reported that their employers did not receive written approval from their parents. Even that is not met.

I would urge the government to repeal Bill 37 and bring back the same protections that were there before 2003, eliminate the \$6-per-hour training wage and increase the hourly minimum wage for all workers to \$10 an hour. The government must comply with the convention

set out by United Nations and the International Labour Organization.

**D. Barnett:** I stand today to speak against the resolution.

Young people in British Columbia are independent people who need all the help they can get to move on with life. We in British Columbia have employment standards that protect all. I look at speeches that were made earlier today in the House about opportunities and supporting small business. I hear from across the way that one of the things that should be done — and I don't know how this could help protect young people in the workplace — is to increase the minimum wage to \$8 an hour from \$6 an hour for those young people.

I fail to see how increasing wages protects young workers. For those that don't understand the system, the training wage for the first job wage rate is \$6 an hour and only applies to the first 500 hours of employment, after which employers must pay at least the \$8 minimum wage.

When you're in small business, training is important. But along with training comes safety, because as an employer it is your responsibility what happens to your workers. It is not only your responsibility; it is what you hire people for. You hire to train people to do the best they can do to improve the quality of your business. As your business grows, your employees grow. That's what good employers in small, medium and large businesses are about.

[1110]

The average hourly rate for youths is \$13.21 under our strong economy, 1.5 times higher than the minimum wage. Due in part to the training wage, youth unemployment dropped from 17.4 percent in 1998 to 8.4 percent in 2008. A change in the employment standards regulations now, when we talk about the agriculture component, which many young people work at and train at.... The farm labour contractors, to post a vehicle safety notice in each vehicle, as I know that has been a big issue.... Nine information sessions on employment standards were delivered to workers by ESB in 2008.

Producers who employ the services of unlicensed farm labour contractors are now subject to mandatory penalties, and four such penalties were issued in 2008. We can continue not to impose more regulations when we have the best regulations possible — when we have workers compensation regulations, which are now under a new entity, that have been improved. If we look at WorkSafe B.C. on their website, it is amazing — the standards that are there today.

I live with and talk to small, medium- and large-sized businesses continually. They will continue to hire our youth, but not if they can't afford to hire our young youth. As I said before, they are more concerned about youth safety than the youth are. They understand the

ramifications with the regulatory regime we now have in this province and this country to protect young people.

There is also one component that we must always remember. I am a mother and a grandmother. I raised two boys, rough and tough, had a business that my children started to help mom and pop with probably at the age of six, and I wasn't a slave.

But I can tell you that my sons learned work standards and ethics from their father and carried them on through life. I now have a grandson. He is learning the same way. We as parents owe responsibility to make sure that our children are safe, and we cannot continuously ask Big Brother to step into our homes and guide the way.

I know many people that, every time we do, say to me: "We are parents. We are responsible. We know where we send our children — whether it be to work, school or play."

I suggest that British Columbia is fortunate — fortunate in the regulatory regime we have that sometimes we too find cumbersome; fortunate that our businesses recognize our youth of today and recognize that early training will make these people stronger, more independent and continue to create an economy that we in this province enjoy day to day.

**M. Elmore:** I rise to speak in favour of the motion. I think it's a priority. I think it's an important issue to call for the repeal of Bill 37 and to re-implement the employment standards to protect young workers, which were struck down in 2003. I think there's a fundamental difference in that this side of the House and certainly this motion see the role of government in terms of advocating on behalf of and protecting children in B.C., versus the other side.

I think that one key difference is the role of government to ensure — and in this case, particularly for children who are working — that there's an important obligation and a responsibility for government to play.

[1115]

The one issue that I think should be made clear is that there is a need to provide legislation and regulation governing children from the ages of 12 to 15 for the very distinct reason that they are not regular workers. It's not good enough. I don't think it's good enough to say that children who are working — ages 12, 13, 14, 15 — have the same regulations as regular workers.

They're not regular workers. These are children. These are kids, and I think there's an obligation for our government to ensure that children are protected if they're forced into having to work. That's an important distinction. We've seen that.

Since the bill came in, what were the concerns of the critics and advocates who advocate on behalf of children? They were that we would see an increase in injuries of children on the worksite because it wasn't regulated. There was a concern that we would see that we wouldn't be able to track data, because they removed the permitting process — the government no longer

has an ability to track and document children who are working — and that it would also lead to increased economic exploitation.

We've seen that documented now with the recent report from First Call 2008 and also building on the report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives from 2005. We've seen that injury rates have increased tenfold in children. Children, Madam Speaker — 12-, 13-, 14-year-olds — tenfold.

This is a serious situation. Those are the reported injuries, and the problem is that we don't have a full picture of that because there is no mechanism to report and actually track the number of children that are working.

There's a need to bring in a regulatory framework to track that and to hold employers accountable. It's not enough to say that it's up to the parents, that it's fine. All parents, I know, are concerned about their children. Some parents are under more stress than others.

The report that came back is that children reported that up to 50 percent of the employers did not get a written confirmation from one of their parents, for different reasons. You have parents, single-parent families and also a higher number now of single-parent families working — working-poor families. In terms of who is impacted by the deregulation, it's the families and these kids at the lower-income levels who are further marginalized and at risk.

Those are some important priorities in terms of the need to bring in a very basic regulatory framework to ensure that in B.C., we're meeting at least the Canadian standards. Shockingly, we rank the lowest in Canada in terms of regulating worksites for our young workers. The United States and the European Union also do not share legislation matching ours. We do not provide regulations to protect young workers in our workforce — very shocking as well.

There is certainly a need to ensure that children are protected, that the employers are held accountable and also that we have a measure to actually record the number of children who are working, and also record and document how many 12-, 13-, 14- or 15-year-olds we have in the workforce and the conditions that they're working under.

Another issue as well, besides the lack of protection and the increase in injuries, is the system that they face in terms of the training wage, that young workers across the province are subjected to the lowest training wage in Canada and also the lowest minimum wage. These issues are very pressing.

[1120]

Madam Speaker, I'm in support of the motion calling for the repeal of Bill 37 and adopting the employment standards that we had prior to 2003.

**R. Howard:** It's my pleasure to rise today. I'll be speaking against this motion. I'd first like to emphasize that it

is unacceptable to this government that any worker be injured in the workplace, especially our young workers who may not be as well equipped to spot risks and deal with them. This government takes the safety and well-being of our young workers very seriously no matter what their age or circumstance.

I think it's also important to note that prior to 2001, during the period governed by the opposition, there was a permit system in place that was poorly administered and had little, if any, oversight. Young workers in the province prior to 2001 were working with little or no oversight whatsoever. The permit system used was known to be completely ineffective and had the younger workforce in this province at significant risk, due in part to some very confusing rules.

When this government came to power, modernizing employment standards was undertaken as part of our overall goal of stabilizing the workforce and encouraging best practices. We encouraged both employees and employers to design, develop and implement safe and healthy best practices that would make our workplaces both safe and sustainable.

This government amended the Employment Standards Act in 2002. Included in these amendments were tools that gave workers and employees opportunities to negotiate new and positive relationships that helped them compete and prosper. Also included in these changes were increased protection rights for vulnerable workers by better enforcement of employment standards rules and more severe repercussions for those employers who did not meet the standards.

Also, this government imposed the strongest mandatory penalties in the entire country — yes, Madam Speaker, the strongest mandatory penalties in the entire country — for breaches of the Employment Standards Act.

WorkSafe B.C. has also implemented several campaigns to promote safety for our young workers. Some are targeted at high schools and some at the broader community.

The Raise Your Hand website is a prime example. This website offers a whole range of opportunities for anyone but is specifically targeted at youth to get educated and to enhance awareness from videos to blogs to on-line quizzes and an on-line know-your-rights section. There are also links to Twitter and Facebook.

This unique website is just one example but provides a valuable on-line learning tool to the younger workforce in a way that is familiar to the younger workforce. In 2007 WorkSafe B.C. created new occupational health and safety regulations targeted specifically at the orientation and training of new and young workers.

This government has reduced and clarified regulations at WorkSafe B.C. There was a myriad of regulations, sometimes duplicative, often confusing and, as a result, tough to understand and also tough to enforce. So this government acted and streamlined regulations, working in

cooperation with industry and other partners to deliver health and safety regulations that created an environment of clarity and understanding and resulted in a safer workforce.

[1125]

There is evidence of success. We had our lowest injury rate in our history in 2008 — down 27 percent from 1999 — and successful return-to-work outcomes for seriously injured workers at an all-time high of 80 percent. In the early 2000s we saw a number of challenges, and we have acted to resolve them successfully.

**L. Krog:** I'm delighted to rise this morning to support the motion of the member for Burnaby-Edmonds, someone who has spent a lifetime advocating on behalf of workers and those who needed protection in our workplaces.

I'm almost left speechless, literally speechless, by the remarks of the members on the government side on this issue. I would have thought that this morning — speechless — those members would have stood up and acknowledged for once that what they did with Bill 37 was just plain wrong.

I have news for the member for Cariboo-Chilcotin. Ward and June Cleaver are dead. All right? The '50s don't exist anymore. I'm afraid that the possibility that children get proper guidance from their parents at home and that we're all little happy families where everything is great and wonderful just isn't on. The reality is that in most families, both parents are out working now. They expect that if their children are going to be in the workplace, they're going to be protected.

There is a damning statistic that I haven't heard either of the members of the government side refer to this morning, and that is simply this. In 2005, there were four claims for job-related injuries for children under the age of 14. By 2008 it was 42 — 42 children injured in the workplace in this province directly as a result of change to those horrible regulations that this government seems to think if we just eliminate, we'll create paradise here in British Columbia.

Well, this side of the House doesn't believe those regulations have created paradise. They have in fact resulted in injuries to children. Let's not kid ourselves. A 14-year-old is a child. A 13-year-old is a child. A 12-year-old is a child.

Ideology is no substitute for common sense. What the numbers tell you is that in the workplace in British Columbia, children are less safe today than they were before those changes were made in Bill 37. That's what the member for Burnaby-Edmonds is raising today — the opportunity for this government to reconsider.

I would remind the members what the motion says: "That this House support discussion and debate of changes to employment standards to protect young workers under the age of fifteen." I would have thought that this government would have stepped up to the plate and said: "You know what? We're prepared to reconsider the decisions we

made. We're prepared to look at the statistics. We're prepared to speak up on behalf of children in this province."

What do we know about the workplace? We know that it's less safe. We know that we have no statistics because this government doesn't believe in keeping statistics. We have no statistics to tell us how bad it is. I suspect if we actually kept the statistics and if we actually looked at the numbers, the situation would look even worse. There would be a huge public outcry, as there should be on this issue.

We've got the lowest work-start age in North America. Welcome to northern Alabama. Isn't that a great, great accolade for the province of British Columbia?

I would have thought that this government would have been more interested in seeing children in school, getting an education and being safe, rather than being out in the workforce at 12 years old. The great lessons of life — you don't have to learn them all at 12 or 13 or 14. There's lots of opportunity. But getting a good education, being safe, being able to survive — that's important.

Why would we want to place children at risk? There are immigrants who come from all around the world to live in British Columbia in a society where they think standards are higher, where we actually practise what we preach. When this Legislature won't stand up and meet the call of the children who have been injured in this province, who are asking for protection — when this Legislature won't step up to the plate and do that — it is shameful.

We in this province should be leaders, not followers. It is no leadership to repeal a regulation that protects children. It is no leadership to refuse to debate the issue. It is no leadership to fail to respond to obvious numbers that demonstrate there is a serious issue and a serious problem here.

The message you send to children when you don't regulate the workplace they work at is that they don't matter. That's the message you send. It's no different than when you pack kids off into alternate schools that are substandard facilities. The message to them is that they don't matter.

We in this chamber have a duty to tell the children who are out in the workforce in this province that they matter. The way we demonstrate that in a tangible way is to ensure that they work in a safe environment, properly regulated. We know what numbers they are. We know whether they're safe. We know whether they're not safe, and we're going to do something about it instead of pretending that everything is just fine in the province of British Columbia for children.

It's shameful. I'm surprised that this government won't do the right thing for once.

[1130]

**P. Pimm:** I, too, am going to rise, and I'm certainly not going to be supporting this motion. I think we do

have the regulations in place now. I think that WorkSafe B.C. does a very good job looking after the interests of not just the young people but of all of the workers in the area and throughout the province.

I heard lots of talk this morning about small businesses and small business around the province and this being Small Business Month. Certainly, I come from a very strong small business background — been a small business man for.... I think 21 years old is when I first started my first business and kind of been going down that track ever since.

Sometimes you have to weigh things out and weigh the balance. This government has gone a long way to reducing red tape and to making it a marketplace that small business can actually work in and survive and strive for better relationships for everybody throughout the province.

When you talk about any kind of injury to any employee of any age or any description, I don't think anybody in either side of this House would agree that that's something that we should be supporting, and so I think that WorkSafe B.C. does go a long way down that track. Certainly, I know that in my industry, for example, not only do we have the WorkSafe B.C., but we've got an Employment Standards Act, which I think is very good for business.

We also have industry regulating us. We have to maintain our own safety programs, the programs that we put in place and administer through our own staff. They're expenses to the business, but you go that extra little bit and you put those things in place. Now industry is also making us look at other things — COR certification.

We look at COR certification, and they're good programs. Now WorkSafe B.C. is actually starting to acknowledge the SECOR and COR certification programs. They're starting to give you a reduction on your rates through the programs that they've got. You can get up to a 15 percent rebate when you put your STAR COR and SECOR in place for your employment.

When you go through a safety program with a company, you have your own orientation programs. That orientation program takes into consideration everything that's in your shop. You walk through. If you have a grinder, you explain how a grinder works, and then you have a procedure and a policy on how to make that piece of equipment work for you and the safety procedures that go along with it. That goes for every piece of equipment that you have in your entire shop.

That's no different for anything. Any organization out there that has employees working for it.... Your own orientation programs are the thing that you should be looking at the most.

Industry even carries it one step further. They'll take your COR programs, and they incorporate HSE programs or comply work programs or IS network programs. All these things — they all work to improve the safety within the

industry and within small business in the area. Whether it's a young employee or an older employee, safety is definitely paramount for all, but it has to be safety so that you can still keep the competitiveness of your business and keep your business moving in the right directions.

When you talk about, just on the younger employees.... You know, we have been modernizing employment standards. It's an important part of the government's overall goal of encouraging employees and employers to develop healthy workplace relationships that lead to good, sustainable jobs.

I think the young employee, the 13-, 14-, 15-year-olds.... I truly endorse them going to work at that age. It's good; it gets them out and teaches them what life is all about.

[1135]

They don't stay home and stay in front of their TV screens and watch and play their video games. They get out and actually get involved in their communities. They start understanding what working is and what it's going to take to become a future entrepreneur and keep the small business communities going and keep them strong.

So I think this government is on the right track. I think that we do have our WorkSafe B.C. policies and programs in place and our Safety Standards Act, Employment Standards Act. I think it's all going down the right track.

**K. Conroy:** I, too, rise today to support this motion before the House this morning, and I want to relate this to a very personal experience. We're talking about children here. We're not talking about adults. We're talking about children working.

In 1995 our daughter was 14. She approached her dad and myself because she wanted to get a job. She had an opportunity to work in a local child care facility. We had a number of discussions about the job, the work she would be doing and who would be supervising her. As well, we talked about her school work and whether she would fall behind in her studies. We had to sign a form that gave her permission to work. She also went and talked to her teachers and the school principal. She also had to get the principal of the school to sign that form, saying she was allowed to work and would not fall behind in her school work.

We then talked to the employer and the person who would be directly supervising her about what her duties would be. After all of these discussions, we all agreed — the employer; us, her parents; and her teacher — that she could work the Monday to Friday, four to six. She would be cleaning all of the small toys, tables, mats, things that the kids used, and after she was finished with that, she would be caring for the infants and toddlers.

She was going to be given training on how to properly clean all the toys and equipment while being safe

to not only herself but to the kids who would be playing with the stuff after. Also, we knew she would never be alone. She would always be supervised. She would never be alone with the children. She would be continually given the training she needed and her school work wasn't going to slip.

This was an incredibly positive experience for her. It was a positive experience for the kids that she actually worked with and the parents she came in contact with and with her employer. So much so that these experiences, 14 years later, she utilizes in her day-to-day life as a mom of three kids but also as a family child care provider to kids in the community. She runs into kids and families that she worked with as a young person of 14, and it was an incredibly positive experience.

Unfortunately, with the changes in 2003, with the passing of Bill 37 that amended the Employment Standards Act and eliminated the requirement for employers to obtain a permit to employ the children, it eliminated the permit that required parents to sign off on it, that required the school principal to sign off on it for children between the ages of 12 and 14. Young people today are not having that same positive experience that our daughter did 14 years ago.

There is far more opportunity now for children to be exploited and to actually be harmed by the working conditions that are just not safe, and we know this because the kids are reporting back. Kids who are now working — and we're talking 12- to 14-year-olds.... We're not talking about teenagers — 18-, 19-year-olds that are ready to go into the workforce. We're talking about very young people.

So 70 percent of the kids that were working said that they had no adult supervision some or all of the time. More than half of them reported that their employer did not receive any written approval from their parents, and 58 percent of them reported that they absolutely knew that they were not going to be supervised and that their parents had no idea, no knowledge of that.

These amendments also remove the role of the employment standards branch in the Ministry of Labour in predetermining the suitability of a worksite for a child employee in that same age group of 12 to 14.

Now, putting the sole responsibility for anyone other than an employer onto parents and to think that parents are going to have the time or even think that they actually would need to — parents don't think that they actually would need to — check up on the safety of their children in the workplace is a ludicrous concept, and studies have shown that this is just not happening as more and more children are being injured in the workplace.

[1140]

Again, the stats show that more than half of the children that were interviewed said that their parents did not come and check on the safety issues in the workplace, and I think it bears repeating. The few stats we do

have when we look at them — the WorkSafe B.C. stats.... Four claims for injured children under the age of 14 in 2005, and a tenfold increase in 2008 with claims for 42 children. These are children that were harmed, that were injured in the workplace, in unsafe workplaces.

What is even sadder is a change to the permitting. Now, a permit is still required to employ a child under the age of 12, Madam Speaker. How unacceptable is that — to encourage children under the age of 12 to be working? Sure, kids should learn responsibilities, like a paper route or shovelling the neighbour's snow, but actual paid employment under the age of 12.... Children that age should be playing. They should be enjoying their life. They shouldn't be working in jobs that are not safe or not properly supervised.

Many of us, members in this House, who have grandchildren have talked with pride about them and our hopes and goals for them. The Premier himself talked about his goals for his own grandchildren and how he wanted to make sure he made decisions that were going to be positive. He did say: "That means we have to make some tough decisions, but at least I made them with the right thing in mind, and that was the future that they had and that all other grandkids in the province will have."

Well, if anyone thinks that enabling children to work under the age of 12 in unsafe and unhealthy jobs makes a better future for kids, they need to give their head a shake, because that is just not the reality in this province.

My two oldest granddaughters just turned nine, and I can't imagine either of them working — now or in the future — in paid employment. I mean, one of them does have a paper route, and she takes it very seriously. One day a week she goes out and delivers her papers, always with a parent or an aunt and uncle in tow. She never is on her own. It's teaching her responsibility, some money management, but not in a place where she's working that is unsafe, without supervision. That's what kids should be doing.

Modernizing the Employment Standards Act, as the former member said, does not mean dumbing the standards down to the level of the lowest standards. We should be ensuring that the standards ensure that children will have healthy and safe places to work and that the standards don't put our children at risk.

This motion — that this House support discussion and debate of changes to employment standards to protect young workers under the age of 15 — is about children. It's not about adults; it's about children. It's a motion that urges all of us to work to ensure that we must have legislation in place that is supportive of young people who choose to work in a safe and healthy environment with their parents' support but, above all, lets kids be kids.

**D. Horne:** It's interesting, always, as I stand in this place and we listen to the debate on these motions. One

of the members spoke about the fact that parents abdicating their responsibility, parents not involved in their children's upbringing, parents not caring about their children is all right, a quote saying that we're not in the 1950s anymore, that parents should completely abdicate their role and that government must take responsibility for all children in the province of British Columbia.

Then we have another member opposite who speaks about her daughter, her daughter who got a job in a day care situation and the fact that she was very, very involved in the decision — the fact that they went and took a look at what she would be doing, the fact that they took a look at the employer, the fact that they involved the teacher and made sure that the studies and school wouldn't fall behind. Taking all of those things into consideration, they finally said that yes, this makes sense.

When the Employment Standards Act was changed, it was changed so that parents would take responsibility. To say that employers can simply employ a child in this age range without any measures in order to make sure that it's safe and that the child is cared for is simply untrue. The Employment Standards Act was changed so that parents have a role. Parents must sign off. The employer must gain the permission of the parent for the child to work. That's very, very important.

[1145]

The thing that seems to be missed in this entire debate is the fact that this is not about employment standards. Every member opposite who has stood up has talked about safety in the workplace. Safety in the workplace is regulated by WorkSafe B.C. Every employer is regulated by WorkSafe B.C., whether you're 12 years old or 50 years old, and we must maintain high standards.

Basically, this government wants to make sure that we have very, very safe workplaces and that we have the highest penalties in Canada for those employers that don't listen and don't maintain the law. We have a very safe workplace.

One of the interesting statistics that was mentioned earlier was that the number of injured workers under the age of 15 has increased from four to 42. Well, statistics are an interesting thing. Basically, one of the things that we have to look at when we look at statistics is did it really increase from four to 42, or are we actually more on top of things now than we were many years ago? I would say that the reason why we now know that there are 42 is because we're much more on top of things.

Under the last government, under the NDP, they had a system of permits for between 12 and 15, and only a few hundred permits each year were issued. Obviously, they had no clue as to what was happening.

When we upgraded the Employment Standards Act, when we made the changes, when we brought parents in so that parents would take responsibility for their own children, obviously not only did we make sure that we

were understanding better what was happening within this age group, but we actually made sure that we were caring for the children and that the workplaces were better managed and better operated than they were before. That's why we modernized the Employment Standard Act, and that's why we have safer workplaces today than we've ever had.

It's very, very difficult, because the members on the opposite side would like to basically increase regulation for everything. Our government is strongly committed to making sure that regulations are reduced in British Columbia but in doing so making sure that the key values that we hold as British Columbians are maintained — the key values of making sure that we support our families, that we give the families the right to make the decisions for themselves and that basically we make sure our workplaces are safe. That's certainly what this government has done.

One of the key rates that one of my colleagues mentioned earlier was injury rates in British Columbia. In 2008 we saw one of the lowest rates ever, down 27 percent from 1999. We want to see that this continues. This is very important to ensure that we have well-regulated, very safe workplaces.

Having people involved in jobs, in working within the community is important too. It's part of the learning experience, so we must make sure that it's not seen as overall what they're up to and what their life goal is but that it teaches them. It teaches them respect for others. It teaches them commitment and responsibility. It teaches them teamwork.

Many of these things are very important. As an employer and someone who employed many people over many years, one of the things that I think is dwindling is the sense of teamwork, the sense of commitment, the sense of pride in what we do.

By having people involved and working on a paper route or in a day care or in the many other things — shovelling snow that was mentioned.... I would assume that the person was being paid for shovelling snow. Building your own little enterprise when you're younger, going out into the community, shovelling snow and doing these things for the community, as we talked earlier about — this is very, very important.

The other aspect that was mentioned by one of the members earlier was on the minimum wage and on how much these young people are paid. It gives me a good opportunity. Earlier we were talking about small businesses, and I was about to make a point on the minimum wage and, unfortunately, wasn't watching the time, so this now gives me an opportunity to complete that. We keep pounding away on the minimum wage. The minimum wage is so, so important.

[1150]

Well, I can tell you, which is the point that I was about to make, that Starbucks, Tim Hortons — many large corporations — don't start people out at the minimum

wage. They start people out at \$9 or \$10 an hour. In many parts of the province people who are working at Tim Hortons are making \$14 an hour. So to talk about the minimum wage, you know, is just absurd.

One of the things that's very, very important to note is that the average youth wage in British Columbia is over \$13 an hour, and that's something that we should be proud of. It's something that we.... Building a strong economy — having a place for young people to work to learn the skills, to learn respect, to learn commitment — is extremely important.

We have some young people in the gallery. Many times we have young people in the gallery. I'm certain that if in consulting with their parents and finding a good opportunity for themselves, they wanted to work, rather than having to through go the bureaucratic nightmare of applying for a permit, they would simply want to go and apply and get a job, get permission from their parents to do so and go forward.

This has nothing to do with their safety — absolutely nothing to do with their safety. Safety is a separate issue, something this government takes great concern with and something that this government is on top of and has put very, very strong regulations in place.

I'm against this motion. It's just simply not necessary.

[Mr. Speaker in the chair.]

**M. Karagianis:** I'm very happy to stand and take my place in this debate because I absolutely, wholeheartedly support the motion that we are debating here this morning.

Very interesting to listen to the depth and breadth of justification going on here today by government members and the amount of denial around the facts that have been laid before us here for debate today. It would seem to me that the government is really avoiding looking at the real issue here with a lot of diversionary tactics.

Here is the reality: this government made regulatory changes. They took actions here within the province of British Columbia that now have allowed children as young as 12 to work with the permission of only one parent. This is providing significantly less protection for child workers than any other jurisdiction in Canada — in fact, in many places across the world.

We have now stooped to the lowest protective standards for children in the workplace — fact. When the government wants to justify or deny their responsibility for this, it's just not true. They, in fact, have made these regulatory changes. Now we have statistics coming forward, and let's be clear here. Statistics Canada does not track workers under the age of 15, and so these statistics have had to be gathered by another organization here looking after the welfare of children.

Since 2004 when this law came into action, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of young children

being hurt in the workplace. We are not talking about young adults. We are talking about children under the age of 15. This government has done so little to protect these individuals in the workplace.

When I see the kind of statistics laid before us, and I hear the kind of debate we're having... We are not living in the time of Charles Dickens. This is not some Dickensian novel that we are discussing — you know, the number of children at the age of 12 or 14 hurt in a workplace and a government that is standing up in denial or justification of that.

In fact, this government has put in place no kind of system to track the number of children under 15 in the workforce. They have made no steps whatsoever to place any kind of legislative or regulatory restrictions on the kind of work that children can do — the tasks, occupations, time of day, many of the other protections that could be put in place for children. This government, in fact, has done none of that.

It is alarming to me that we see a dramatic increase in the number of injuries in the workplace for young children under the age of 15 and that we have a government that does not seem prepared to take real steps towards rectifying this situation.

We need to have regulatory oversight to know how many children under the age of 15 are working in the workplace. We need to make sure that we have legislative and regulatory restrictions on the kind of work that those children can be engaged in, to reduce the potential of harm for these individuals. And I think we need to take a very hard look at the fact that so much of what is happening in the workplace now for young people is driven around the need to earn extra income.

[1155]

The poverty levels here in the province of British Columbia and the rising and increased level of poverty

for working families — certainly, the rising level of child poverty here in this province — is driving more young people to try and find ways to earn a living to augment and help income within their families. It is important that we take the responsibility for... Our duty here, as a government in the province of British Columbia, is towards these children.

You know, we refuse to raise the minimum wage. We have a \$6 training wage. We have children under the age of 15 that are now in the workforce in greater numbers. We have so few protections for them that, in fact, I think it is a real statement of the lack of oversight and protection that the government has in place around these regulatory changes.

So let's be clear. This motion is about government's regulatory actions that they have taken here in the province. It is about the number of children who are now in jeopardy in the workplace. It is about the rising concern for legislative protection of children.

It is the responsibility of the government to protect children. So I think that it is justifiable for us to have a debate in this House around that and look to find ways to improve protection for children in the workplace.

M. Karagianis moved adjournment of debate.

Motion approved.

Hon. G. Abbott moved adjournment of the House.

Motion approved.

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

The House adjourned at 11:57 a.m.



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